

Ved Mehta

FACE TO FACE



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For

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F w a z h g h g l d k l y
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This entire book was dictated to my two fellow students JoAn Johnson (Pomona 1956) and Grace Kestenman (Radcliffe 1957) my labour was made easier by JoAn's patience and understanding – not to mention her well-cooked lunches – and Grace's cheerful and alert personality. The devoted and unsparing work of Nancy Reynolds (Atlantic Monthly Press) was invaluable in preparing and brushing up the manuscript for publication. Another good friend to whom I am deeply indebted is my sponsor for it was her timely and generous help that made it possible for me to write at all.

*Balliol College
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VED MEHTA

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Foreword

ABOUT three Christmases ago I was invited by a group of students to speak on India. We want the invitation read, something with flesh and blood something which is more than just a talk on day-to-day happenings in your country.

I rummaged through my file of previous talks, but none of them seemed to fill their order. The longer I sat by my Braille-writer the harder it became to produce what was required. I was about to write and decline the invitation when one of my friends suggested that I use the form of a fairy story but buttress it with real, live stuff. I returned to my Braille-writer and beginning with the sentence 'Once upon a time there was a salt march led by a frail little man' I constructed a successful story of India's struggle for independence, complete with description, dialogue, action and pathos.

Full of trepidation I delivered my talk but from the reaction it seemed that the teenager had not lost their appetite for fairy tales. At the close of the discussion period a young lady, or my right asked 'Have you ever written anything?'

From the back of the room a boy piped up 'It would be hard for him to write in allusion probably, to my blindness.'

This challenge along with that speech was the germ of the present narrative. The real live stuff I knew best was my own experience yet I realised even before I began to write (I was then twenty) that no one man's experiences or reflections were sufficient to justify or inspire a book. But India which I had been born and brought up in was in that health there were colour, splendour and pageantry juxtaposed with tragedy, division and change. I was all too conscious of my own limitations but with the advice that everyone had to learn somewhere I set out in November 1954 and wrote to my own device.

FOREWORD

I began by trying to re-create a house of India with all its colourful awnings and portraits of family members servants and *pa d is* and even the Kapl nglike curios which decorated the mantelpiece. In a way it was easier to build this house because its original had been drowned in the fast current of contemporary history. It seemed natural then to go on to describe the whirlpool of events which had divided my country.

After the intensive writing of that summer I went back to the routine of student until two years later when with the kind co-operation of Edward Weeks and of Norman Cousins the project was resumed. But before the book would be complete I would have to write a section on the United States where I had been living for seven years.

This I undertook with mixed emotions. It would not be hard to criticise about a country to which I owed so much — my education and the use of the English language which made this book possible. And yet so many people had written about America and with a much more eloquent pen and perceptive eye than I could ever command that I wondered if I had much to offer that was new and worth bringing on a reader's bill of fare. Although the opportunity had to effect larger issues, I decided that this final section should be wholly personal in tone.

And so I wrote about the experiences of a boy totally blind set loose alone in the vast and bustling United States at the age of fifteen. The thread plot then is the story of the reception problems and growth of this blind boy until he reached manhood and of the pleasures and warm friendship he experienced in the West. Actually the narrative is a succession of images — images collected from old and new India — one eclipsed one rising — and from America as these images appeared to the boy in the time of his growth.

I

INDIA & HOME

Surmas and School

I : India as elsewhere every girl or boy has fond and warm memories of his childhood, from the day he begins to talk to his mother and father in broken syllables. Invariably a child learns and recognizes the faces of his mother and father of sisters and brothers who play with him constantly, or the servants who prepare his meals or watch him play in a nursery strewn with knick knacks and toys. He must also remember the rich colours of the butterflies and birds which children everywhere always love to watch with open eyes. I say must because when I was three and a half all these memories were expunged, and with the prolonged sickness (meningitis) I started living in a world of four senses – that is, a world in which colours and faces and light and darkness are unknown.

If my age and the length of the sickness deprived me of the treasured memories of sight, they also reduced things which are valued so much in the sighted world to nothing more than mere words, empty of meaning. I started living in a universe where it was not the flood of sunshine streaming through the nursery window, or the colours of the rainbow, a sunset or a full moon that mattered, but the feel of the sun against the skin, the slow drizzling sound of the spattering rain, the feel of the air just before the coming of the quiet night, the smell of the stubble grass on a warm morning. It was a universe where at first – but only at first – I made my way fumbling and faltering.

It was good that I lost my sight when I did, because having no memories of seeing there was nothing to look back to, nothing to miss. I went blind in November 1937. At that time we were living in Gujrat, in the province of Punjab in northern India. After my sickness we moved to Lahore, a few miles away, but the procession of relatives who came to sympathize made

my father ask for another transfer this time to Karnal where we had neither friends nor relatives. There we got a cottage on the canal bank built in very peaceful and quiet surroundings.

As might be expected in the beginning it was tough for all of us — for my mother and my father for my three sisters and my brother and for me too. The illness had left me weak. The servants shirked me although I were an ill eye personified. My sister treated me with care although I were a fragile doll and my mother wept. My father who was a doctor in the public health service was glad that my spine had been tapped in time for and lay on the lumbar punctum would have affected my mind and endangered my life. But he like the rest despaired.

A state of complete inactivity therefore followed my blindness. In part this was due to the immediate shock of the illness but more importantly still the impasse was caused by ignorance of the potentialities of a blind child. Since the only blind persons my parents saw were beggars.

But whether by fate or by the will of God blindness had struck not only a child of the well-to-do but that of an excellently trained doctor who found his training this instance useless.

His wide medical experience had prepared him for an apt acceptance of this tragedy and he understood that a young couple must begin with the realization that I would be blind for the rest of my life.

My mother on the other hand neither would nor could convince herself that my sight would never return. She did not have the medical perspective of my father and she blamed something in her part for the tragedy.

The family physician whose advice mother had relied almost from her childhood was called in and consulted. He knew more about religion and science. Mother said with pride that any other physician in our province I was taken before him and for a long time I sat in my mother's lap while he would sit reflectively. After a while he took my hand and thoroughly examined the legs. Then he looked at Mother and he studied her forehead mumbly and steadily. He said he found himself inadequate, and more physicians would have to be

consulted. At his request, they were called and questioned exhaustively as to what atonement could be made. Although their analyses and remedies differed considerably, they all agreed that by doing penance for her sins, my mother could improve my chance of regaining sight.

They prescribed methods ranging from intensive prayers to strenuous physical exertions, and for a fee they agreed to perform part of the necessary ritual. Each *pandit's* advice was carefully heeded. Since my mother knew that my father would scorn such methods, she kept them secret, making it doubly hard for herself.

Along with this religious counsel was coupled a series of visits to *hakims* (physicians who followed the Greek or Unani system of medicine). These quacks prescribed all types of concocted drops to put in my eyes. The *surmas*, which were administered at all hours of the day and night, burned and stung my eyes, and the only soothing part of the otherwise miserable ordeal was the loving caress of Mother afterwards.

One night when my mother was administering these eye drops, and I was protesting with loud cries, my father unexpectedly returned. He asked and I told him why I was crying. He was outraged.

He questioned Mother as to how long this had been going on, but she would not answer him. She was prepared to bear any outburst silently, and the longer she stayed silent, the more irritated my father grew. He said harshly that her superstitions far surpassed those of any village woman he had ever known. He went on to say that any person with the slightest consideration for her husband would have readjusted her ways in ten years of marriage. All his efforts to break her from her deplorable past had been in vain. He did not want his children brought up in such a tradition.

Even then she did not defend herself. Just as my mother had silently suffered the verdict of my blindness, the self-abasement imposed by the *pandits*, and the pleading which preceded the administration of my eye drops, so now she suffered my father's anger quietly. He forbade her to make any more visits to the

hak ms and strictly prohibited the purchase of any more *surmas*. Then he gently lifted me from her arms and took me away. With steady hands he bathed my stinging eyes. After this incident although we stopped going to *hak ms* now and then applications of *um* continued until I was eleven. But they were very mild and my mother always obtained my consent in advance.

I remember other little tests my mother put me through. One day she perceived that just before I arrived at a closed door I would stop and reach for the handle to open it. She began letting me go about the house by myself and she discovered that I seldom ran into things. She edited the *hak m* and the stinging drops but every evening she would hold her hand up before my face and ask me to tell her where it was. She used to shake the hand before me so that myriads of pees next to below and above my ear could feel her hand when it was a foot away. The air current helped me to spot it. But she wasn't satisfied with this. She wanted me to tell her whether the light was on or

off. When I failed this test she was unhappy again but I soon caught on and would listen for the click of the switch and then tell her. Sometimes she would flip the switch very rapidly time and again and I would always count the clicks and give her the right answer.

The reason for the conflicting approaches of Mother and Father towards my blindness lay in each of their backgrounds. My mother had come from a large middle-class family and had thirteen sisters and thirteen brothers. She was the eldest of the sisters, and at the time when she came to attend school it was still customary for even the best-educated women to go only as far as the eighth grade. Thus her education had ceased with simple arithmetic and Hindu grammar. From that time until her marriage fifteen years later she had devoted herself to cooking, sewing and caring for the younger brothers and sisters. While these activities trained her to be an excellent mother, they did not prepare her to cope rationally with an unfamiliar tragedy such as blindness. She found the weapons of love and affection useless. If she pampered me as her maternal instinct dictated, my

father would scold her, and if she tried to use the medical cures which had been practised and handed down from mother to daughter for generations, my father would forbid their use

My mother married my father when she was seventeen. They had little in common for while my father had travelled extensively abroad and had moved in a society completely foreign to our native culture my mother had been brought up in the strict discipline of a very conventional Indian home. In fact she had not even seen a white woman until she met one when in the company of my father. My father was a very restless person, quick tempered and impatient. He often went to clubs and dinners where English speaking people were present and he would return home late at night from the club where he had been playing a game of cards. I think my mother must have felt almost as apart from him as if he were an Englishman.

Then her first child had turned out to be a daughter much to the disappointment of her relatives and friends who blamed her for the miscarriage of their wishes. The second also was a daughter and the third child was no more pleasing than the first two. Some hints were made to give up since there seemed no hope of getting a son although in all fairness to my father, he seemed to grow more and more attached to Mother and home and he was very fond of all three daughters. In fact, he spoiled them.

At last a son came and the event was celebrated with great joy and festivity. As an anti-climax to this addition I had arrived, and even more people with gifts had come to see me than had celebrated the birth of my brother Om Parkash.

While my mother's parents had always lived in the congested city of Lahore in a comparatively middle class home, my father's childhood had been spent in the carefree atmosphere of village life. His grandfather had been the leader of a village on the bank of the Ravi River. In a small way, he had been a philanthropist and had been loved and revered by all the villagers. At his death, he had given half his land to the Brahmans, and had left the care of the rest of his property to his eldest son.

According to the village tradition the eldest son was charged with the care of the whole family. Thus my grandfather Lalaji was responsible for his two brothers' families as well as his own. Even children, the eldest of his boys was my father. These combined families formed one large household typical of the village family system of India.

Recalling his experience in this family my father remarked: It was a village within a village. He tells me that many relatives used to come to visit them, sometimes doubling the size of the household and that, even in those days, as interpreted liberally, people would stay for months at a time while my grandmother and the girls did all the cooking. Lalaji had inherited all the responsibility of his father and whenever any neighbours could not afford to go elsewhere they came to him. He in turn would send them to my grandmother, the Bhabiji, who had somehow to provide for them. One day my grandfather sent a neighbour to her in the middle of the month when the supplies were nearly exhausted. Bhabiji knew that she had to make the provisions last until the end of the month and it was impossible to do so unless very grain was conserved. She explained to the neighbour that there was nothing to spare but when Lalaji heard of this he was enraged and told Bhabiji that there was always plenty in his home. When there was a shortage in the home it was the women of the household and family who starved.

Of the six children of the family, six were boys and Lalaji wanted to make it very clear that each of them should receive a college education and obtain a high position. A person with limited means in a country where eighty per cent of the people are illiterate. When the children came of school age they started attending a government school located two miles from the village. They had to walk this distance after doing their chores each morning and on the way home they rested under the trees to finish their homework.

Lalaji never treated them as children but always as grown-up and from the time when he was nine years old my father was charged with looking after his younger brothers and setting them a good example. At the age of fifteen he entered Govern-

ment College in Lahore for the premedical curriculum. Two years later having passed the Intermediate examination he joined the King Edward Medical College in Lahore, where he distinguished himself both in scholarship and sports – a rare combination indeed.

My father was very ambitious and independent. In April 1919 when Gandhiji was arrested trying to enter Punjab in spite of the ban on his entry, my father joined the college strike organized as a protest against this high handedness of the British; therefore his merit scholarship was confiscated and he was dropped for a year. Although my father's punishment was rescinded a few months later by the committee appointed by the government to review these punishments, his scholarship was never restored.

In 1920 immediately on obtaining his degree in medicine and surgery which entitled him to enrolment in the *British Medical Register* he proceeded to England for post graduate courses in tropical medicine and public health. This my father did in spite of the advice of the Government Advisory Committee which doubted the possibility of admission of Indian students to the already crowded universities of Great Britain.

My father was the first in the family to venture across the high seas. All his relatives except Lalaji were opposed to his leaving for England. They believed he would lose his caste and that such education was bound to change his way of life and destroy his native heritage. He would certainly be a misfit in Indian society if he returned. It was also argued that he might marry and settle down in England, which would prove disastrous to the education of his younger brothers. Finally, it was considered most unwise to take the risk with the limited resources that the family had. However he went.

In England my father attended the University of London, completing his education in public health in record time. He then returned to India and as he disembarked in Bombay, his younger brother, who had finished his medical schooling in India, boarded a ship for England to receive the same training.

My father took a job in the newly created Public Health

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Department as a Municipal Health Officer. Since he was the first to earn his living, he not only helped his younger brothers but also contributed to the living expenses of the family. In 1902 he was selected as one of the first Rockefeller Fellows to tour Europe and the United States and with this start he went on to a distinguished career in India. His success enabled him to assist his brothers and his older sister's sons in completing their education. From the very beginning Lalaji had indoctrinated him with the value of education and thereafter he never ceased to strive until all in his family who deserved an opportunity for education had received it.

Although in my case there was an obstacle which seemed insurmountable, he was determined to leave no avenue unexplored. He read all available literature on blindness. He learned that almost all India's blind people had turned to begging or their livelihood or had become winners of *pan* and *biri* shops and spent their days rolling nut and condiment in a betel leaf or tobacco in a garut paper. He was determined that this was not going to be the fate of his only son and he started corresponding with many of the prominent educational authorities asking their advice. The replies were not optimistic. For the blind educational facilities and personnel were limited and often the school became a mausoleum with all ages grouped together in a law without any gradation system.

My father himself decided for he knew that my staying at home would result in overindulgence. He realized as well that I would have difficulty playing with normal children and that my mother would always be afraid to let me leave the immediate premises.

At last he heard of Dr R. M. Halder, principal of Dadar School for the Blind in Bombay. My father wrote to him asking advice. Dr Halder showed unusual interest in my case and promised to take special care and personal responsibility for me if I were sent to his school.

When my mother learned of my father's decision to send me to the Dadar School, she was appalled. She had never been to Bombay and to her it might have been a foreign country.

She could not understand the reason for sending me nine hundred miles away from home to attend school with orphans and children of the poorest classes. After all, another year at home could not but help my development. Yet she placed her faith in my father's superior judgement, and in her quiet way she acquiesced.

On 15 February 1939 when I was almost five, my mother and father took me to Karnal station. There I was to board a train for the first time, accompanied by one of my father's friends who was going on to Bombay. When the whistle blew, my father said to me, 'Now you are a man.' Then he clasped my hands and drawing the palms together within his own, he murmured the Hindu blessing, *Namaste*. I felt him lift me through the window as he handed me to his friend and I leaned out just in time to kiss my mother before the train started moving.

It was an express train, and we covered the distance in a day and a half. My remembrance of the journey is that I cried and slept intermittently, overcome by all the strangeness which surrounded me.

My Cousin Prakash who was posted in Bombay met my train and we took a *tonga* from the station to the school. I was overjoyed to ride in the familiar horse-drawn carriage because it was something I could cling to from the past. After about an hour's ride we slowed down and entered the congested smoke-filled district of Dadar. The rhythmic beat of the tramway bells, the loud shouts of the conductors at each junction, the irregular rumble of the wheels on the narrow rails stood in sharp contrast to the quiet murmur of the canal water near our spacious bungalow at home. I was frightened and I begged Cousin Prakash to take me home. We finally reached the gate of what Cousin Prakash described as a narrow three storey building, sandwiched between a cotton mill and a congested shop district. Now I was at school.

It was about four thirty in the afternoon, and the students had just finished their tiffin. Getting up from the floor, they

in her arms and kissed me. She told me she was my aunt and Dr Halder my uncle, and she hoped that I would come to her just as I would to my mother. I was to eat in their private dining room and not with the other children. Then Dr Halder took me back to the dormitory where I waited the dreaded return of the students from the dining room.

That evening a spring bed with a heavy mattress and a mosquito net was moved in and placed beside Deoji. From then on I was known as the boy with the good bed and soft hands. Later Deoji put me to bed and tucked the mosquito net under the edges of the mattress. I couldn't go to sleep, for the students were still in a fit of excitement over the arrival of a new student. They talked about how gently Dr Halder had asked me to follow him and how neatly I was dressed. Abdul still contended that my hands were like a girl's and that I had never worked. Amidst this clamour was heard the loud coughing of Dr Halder and one of the older students shushed the others. Dr Halder, with quick, clicking steps, walked into the room and turning off the light, reminded everyone in his shrill voice that it was time to go to sleep and that severe punishment would follow if he heard any commotion.

The large, unfriendly room, the distant voice of Dr Halder, and the huge bed seemed far removed from my cosy bed in my parents' room but soon sleep overcame me.

In the middle of the night I woke up sobbing and all the day's happenings came into focus. Pressing my face against the pillow, I cried silently. Then I felt someone gingerly pull back the mosquito net. It was Deoji. I clung to my pillow. I didn't want him to see me crying, but he gathered me up with the pillow.

I was frightened. Suppose Abdul or Bhasker were to hear me? But Deoji carried me out of the dormitory and sat down on the steps. Clumsily he rested me on the steps and asked me if he could do anything. He did not wait for an answer and started telling me about how he had felt when he first arrived there. He told me that I would soon forget about home, and would find school a very pleasant place. He described the

I had had to eat. When I related to him my dinner of freshly baked white bread and Dr Halder's favourite mutton dish, he sniffed sarcastically, and calling to his friends repeated the menu as indicative of my pampered effeminate ways.

In a tantrum, I cut his cane chair. Then I hid while he clumsily hunted for me. I was afraid Tarak Nath, who was Abdul's best friend and known for his meanness, would disclose me to him, but fortunately for me, and to his lasting credit, he stuck to the rules of fair conduct—namely, that no half-sighted person should interfere in the fight of two blind people.

Abdul strained to hear my breathing or light movement, but I silently tiptoed amid his characteristically vulgar profanity, to the dormitory and Deoji. Thereafter I earned respect and a particular following of my own.

Aside from these personal adjustments in my first few months there, I had to learn much about discipline. I had to make my own bed, and my first experience made me appreciate the value of having no mattress and no mosquito net. I had to sew on my buttons, polish my shoes, eat at regular times and get up at the sound of the bell. As I grew more accustomed to the school life, the routine became easier.

After five months of school when I had just about got settled the summer came and it was time for me to return home. Cousin Prakash came to get me, and together we boarded the train for Lahore, where we were now living since my father had been promoted and transferred in my absence. I expected that the noise and lively activity of the school would soon be replaced by a grieving silence, and I was filled with a longing to leave the train and return to school. Recalling my mother's pain and anguish after my blindness, I was ashamed of not wanting to go home, yet already I preferred the new taste of independence in school, and even the taunts of Abdul seemed more bearable than my sheltered, uneventful life at home.

Reality and the Dream

My parents met me at the station and I found my mother very cheerful. She was so joyed at my return and the same light-heartedness greeted me at our home. There was the infectious laugh of sister Umi to be shared, the moist and warm hand of sister Nimi to rediscover. I had also to get used to taking order from my little Poni who was second in command to Mother. All these sisters pressed me about my doings at school and I repeatedly narrated to them and their friends my encounter with Abdul. They were amused that I had successfully defied an older boy and they were touched when I told them about Deoji.

In the morning it felt wonderful. I slipped my small hand into my mother's big one and running beside her almost at a trot for the family *halwa*. A wonderful infection there would be the smell of the teaming pots, the low and deliberate noise of large spoon stirring the syrup and an aromatic smell of freshly baked hot sweetmeats. At the shop which jutted out on the street like a stand, Mother would lift me and place my hand on the *thal* — the large platters which held a variety of roasted nut and sweetmeats of different sizes and shapes. While my lung breathed in the *hal* air and the old *halwa* with rough and tubby hands gave me sample to taste and Mother held me closely in her arm so that I could lean my way over. I felt like a prince.

Sometimes Mother left me to go to the shop across the street and the *halwa* would let me sit with him on the platform crowded with *thals* and say, 'Sahib, you have the nose, the mouth and the ear all cut out to be a *halwa*.' You just need a bigger machine. I would pick up one big piece after another with my sticky hands and put it into my mouth all at once. I

thought the *halwai* was princely. We would return home with enough sweetmeats for me to open a small shop in my nursery room for my sisters and brother Om.

In the evening there were always the walks to Lawrence Gardens with its small mounds carpeted with lush grass and the rich sounds of children running and playing hide and seek, and the merry go-round turning swiftly and the seesaw thumping against the ground. I ran and played too but one of my sisters always had to be at my side. The Carry Home ice-cream man seemed to be present everywhere peddling his product in small cups which my sisters would let me stuff in my pockets. The open air of the huge gardens felt wonderful after Dadar. So did the care of the servants who made my bed and polished my shoes, and the gentle hand of Mother who bathed me. I was glad Abdul was not there to see all this.

The summer ended and once more my father clasped my hands and said Namaste. Mother kissed me and I started for Bombay with another of my father's friends.

In my second year at school I was old enough to have my own little plot of land, where I planted vegetables and I spent my spare time as did everyone else, caring for them. I had also begun learning multiplication and division on an arithmetic slate and reading and writing Braille in English – at that time there was no uniform Hindi alphabet for Braille. I learned that each of the letters in Braille was formed by various combinations of six dots. The Braille typewriter had only six keys.

Since I was slightly healthier now, I began to take part in more games. Our games differed little from those of normal children, with the exception of running. Behind the cotton mill was an empty lot where half a dozen wires about a hundred yards long were stretched between poles. We had our races there, running with strings attached to rings on the wire. This turned out to be quite a competitive sport, for the winner received not only prizes but recognition from the other students. Although we practised every day, the real contest was held every two months between students of the same size. We would all line up on one end of the stretched wires and Dr Halder

would give each one of us a biscuit. When he said 'Go!' we had to finish the biscuit before beginning to run. If at first I could not run as fast as Bha-ker I could outdo him in eating the biscuit and get a head start on him. I came in first in the fall contest. Organized tug-of-war and a ball which had bells inside provided us with other physical activity. Draughts or clacquers chess and card games formed our indoor sports.

This routine coupled with good friends should have made anyone happy. But with the coming of war prices had gone up and the food at the Hilders had grown steadily worse. Hard pressed because of their low salary they had to conserve their food and besides items like butter and meat were already being rationed. This fact plus the wet and oppressive climate of Bombay and my run-down physical condition conspired to make me spend almost half my three years there in a hospital with every disease of childhood including malaria and typhoid.

Starting with these crises of illness I recollect little more than vague impressions of a hospital and severe fever and all the fresh experience of the early months at Dadar which have left a lasting impression on my memory begin from here on to be jumbled into a world half-dream, half-real. Each month my visits to the hospital increased not only in frequency but also in duration until the hospital became home while the school became a strange illusory place. There is a sharp memory of someone feeling me with a sticky spoon soft-boiled egg which went bad in my hot and dry mouth and it turned my stomach to wallow them. I never wanted soft-boiled egg never again. I recall, too, my expectant waiting for my parents and the repeated disappointment when they did not appear. When I asked whether they had been informed of my illness the answer was always evasive.

Danger of death did not seem too far away in that desolate hospital where again doctors and nurses became my sole guardian and a untrustworthy barrier at best again another tragedy. There was no comfort and no sense whose name I cannot recollect. Neither do I recall her voice. Yet from the memory of

her affection and kindness, I can readily reconstruct a clear, revealing image.

I remember she would come to visit me in her off hours, and even if I were asleep she would sit and watch over me. When I awoke, she would tell me stories of her childhood and amuse me. Then she would be talking about prayer, and of some figure in the distant past. She would ask questions about my mother and sisters, and would assure me they all loved me, that even if they were not present their thoughts were with me. Each time I sneezed she told me that it was the surest indication that they had been talking about me just then, and that if I thought of them at once, they would sneeze too. She said she was a Christian, that she would pray to her God, and that I needn't worry. Her God, she said, had always looked after the sick and uncared for, and no miracle lay beyond him. She would bring me fruit, and even sweets if I were well. I have often asked myself if I ever even thanked her. Probably not. After a while I took her just as much for granted as a chair or a bed, and never once thought of her not being there. For me the hospital became her, and all my previous dread of that place left me.

When I returned to school I found that my energy had been sapped, and that I tired easily. I was ashamed of this and dreaded the play hour, knowing that I couldn't keep up with the others.

One day two boys were swinging on the single swing. Standing on the seat, they pumped until the chains squeaked shrilly with the motion, and I could tell they were swinging quite high. They had been in the swing long past their turn, and despite all my pleading for fair play they would not stop. I ran to grip the chain. When they heard me coming they jerked the chain from my reach by throwing themselves to one side. Furious at my own lack of proficiency I moved closer, only to collide head on with the seat. After that, I remember Dr Halder's arrival, the ambulance, and waking up to the familiar odour of the hospital disinfectant, which seemed less pure than the curling fog which hung over Dadar playground.

When I awoke, my nurse was not there. Disturbing thoughts rushed through my mind. Had she left the hospital,

certain I would not return? Humiliated at my own pride I remembered she had other patient. Yet all of a sudden the same fear and despair I had experienced on my first night at Dadar School returned.

Weak from the blood I had lost and exhausted by my dire thoughts I lay there half awake. Then I heard those soft yet decisive steps which I had grown accustomed and she was there I clung to her and wept.

This accident was simply an interlude between one series of illnesses and another. During all these illnesses she talked to me about being good and praying, but she never explained to my satisfaction what Christianity was. She always said that I was too young and I would learn and understand some day. I did not know if it was she but to something or someone must be attributed my lasting interest in this religion and its continuous source of inspiration.

When I returned to Dadar School I asked Deoji about it and he told me he was a Christian too and added that the Halders were also. He told me that Dada School was founded by American missionaries and that I would like to be there if it hadn't been for them. I asked him if they were anything like the nurse I knew and he told me, judging from my description they were. He taught me an English prayer which I repeated every night before going to sleep.

Hailly Faith thou wilt hear me
Bless thy living child tonight
Though I do feel as though I am
A poor little thing tonight

Almighty God thy hand is full of me,
And I thank thee for it
Thou hast led me and fed me,
Listen to my evening prayer

Let my soul be all for thee
Praise thee and live with thee
Take us that sit in heaven
Happy there with thee to dwell

Since at my home no discussion had centred around religion, I only knew I was a Hindu and no more. I prayed of course but they were only simple requests and I had not learned to form an impressive prayer like the one Deoji taught me. Deoji also found for me some little stories about Christ which he translated for me, and before I left Bombay I was able to read them in Braille by myself.

While thus indirectly I was learning about the Western religion, so too I was being inspired to go across the sea into another land. Dr Halder who had attended Harvard University, had visited the Perkins Institute near Boston (which today is still the foremost institution in the education of the blind) and was endeavouring to construct a small replica of it in Bombay. At the dinner table he often spoke of Perkins and of America and one day even asked me if I would like to go there and suggested that this was my father's wish. My father's enthusiasm for the West and Dr Halder's encouragement were enough to implant in me the desire to travel. A week after my seventh birthday in March Dr Halder took me to two of his friends a Mr and Mrs Thomas who were planning a voyage to America in the summer of 1942. Dr Halder told me it might well be that I could go with them to the States and that he would ask their consent.

When Mr and Mrs Thomas decided to take the responsibility and when they told me of the two-month voyage on the ship I was thrilled at the prospect. Dr Halder followed up this visit with a letter to Dr Farrell, director of Perkins Institute on 19 April, 1941. Counting out the time for my illness and vacation at home, I had attended classes for only one year, and it was on this attendance that he based his recommendation. Since this letter was decisive in shaping my dream to come to America, I quote the important excerpts in full.

The boy has been in the school for about a year only. We do not have standardized mental tests to give the child but basing on his responses and my observations during the period he has been with us I have a feeling that probably he is a superior child. He is much interested in physical activities as well. I should like

th t he g ts an opportu ty to be d cat d n th best institution in th world m l f m t ve a d m t mpre nabl year H s father chos o r school t B mb y th ough 900 m l s aw y fr m h m a he th ught th t th h ld would h e th b t pportun t s of education they ar l bl n Ind We r teaching h m th ough th m dum f Engl h d n Ind n erna ular H unde tand E l h a d n w t the H ll Brail Typewriter When he j d th hool h d d o k w a wo d m Engl h No h has a w kabl oc b l r y f m th z w rd

While I wa too young to be acquainted with the full content of th letter or und r tand its gnifican I did however catch fr m D Halder that enthu a m for an ocean voyage and a new c untry

Dr Halder wa t ll a ry young man and dedicated to impr ing th condit on of the blind and if it happened that I should g t Am ca and return to India conversant with the m re progr W ste n attitude about this handicap I mght ll help t ch ng the urse f Ind an thinking about blindn and ind cily h lp Dr Halder accompl sh his aim

At that tim Dr Hald r was in the process of ompleting a book on analy ing h d eams of the v sually handicapped It wa to be an bye t e tudy a to h w the d ams f the blind d ffered f m th e of th ghted and he asked u students to help h m by retell g ou dreams to him ea h morning For each d eam o ectly reconstructed f r him we would be given a pi e of candy

I used to and st ll do have numerous dreams While I re frain d f om tell ng h m all my dreams I remember however g ng int his offi and relating a dream that I was going to England w th the Halders There wer details about the ship and sea on wh ch h quest n d me clos ly for the theme of h whole book wa to d sc r how blind people pictured their surroundings Did they for n tance see a tree with all its lea es and sp eading bran hes or w uld they only experience it in m tall stark tructur ? Since my ual memory previous to blindness had been completely obliterated because of the long

illness, my experiences in the dreams did not differ from those of waking hours

A month later Dr Farrell of the Perkins Institute replied, but he did not agree with Dr Halder that my most formative and impressionable years should be spent in the United States. He strongly recommended that I should not leave my home environment. He said that his experiences with those coming from the East at an early age to study in the Western world indicated that there was a grave risk of becoming total misfits in Eastern as well as in Western cultures. Dr Farrell mirrored, as we were later to learn, the attitude of almost all the Western educators, and Dr Halder realizing this let the matter rest, and with this vanished my dreams about an immediate visit to America.

I continued my studies at the school for another year and a half, and within two and a half years I had absorbed all the school had to offer. To be sure if I wished to make caning chairs my profession I could have continued there and specialized in that work but academically Dr Halder considered my studies there completed. He wrote to my father to say that since no immediate provisions could be made for my trip abroad the time could be more valuably spent at home rather than at another boarding school. What I needed most he said, was family life.

In spite of climate illness and food Dadar School and Bombay had become home for me. As I boarded the train bound for Lahore, I went with anguish and apprehension. I tried to remember Panjabi and couldn't. Indeed I had a more workable vocabulary in English. I was no longer even a Hindu, for Deoji had convinced me that I was at heart a Christian. I thought and thought, trying to reconstruct the image of my family from their voices but their voices were muffled and distorted, and echoed faintly in the corridors of time and distance.

I leaned forward, and tried to shut out the distracting and exasperating noises around me but in vain. It seemed as though I were going to a place where nobody understood or even knew me. I had no friends in my family for my friends were to be found in the nurse, in Deoji, the Halders, and my class mates.

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Yet no one sympathized with me and even the Halders were astonished by my apathy

And then the compartment jarrred and I knew I would soon hear that definitive sound of departure as the train moved away from the station. It would over-shadow even the loud pleas of the hawkers who lunged to the train. Slowly the train pulled away and the hawks stalked on the permanent way and with this turning completed a circle of my life.

Mehta Gullie

THE whole family met me at the Lahore station, and their happiness over my arrival was radiant and infectious. I soon forgot my apprehensions in that vivacious atmosphere.

Since our own house, which had been built a few years earlier, was being repaired, we moved in with my mother's family, where the whole lot of us were crowded into two rooms. But the cramped quarters were scarcely noticed by us children, since we spent all our waking hours in the *Mehta Gullie* and returned home only to sleep. The *Mehta Gullie* or street, was separated from the main house by a five foot wall.

Climbing this wall we would find ourselves in a completely different world, for behind it and within a radius of two city blocks lay the houses of all the Mehta families comprising a clan of some fifty persons. These houses opened on the *gullie* which was off the Temple Road and formed a square. Our house was not included in the square since it had been built before the planning of the *Mehta Gullie* but it was only a block away.

There were many Mehta children, and all of us played together, but the family which was closest to us was that of my father's younger brother who had received the same medical training as my father, and now worked in his department. He had five children, and they were about our age and had the same interests, although unfortunately there was no playmate for my baby sister Usha, who was born while I was away. The two older daughters, Shil and Lil went to the same school as my sisters Pom, Nimi and Umi. All of them played on the same ball team and often had the same assignments. Yog their younger brother, who was three years older than Om, was the first boy in this generation of the Mehta families, and whenever we played

any game he was the leader. He chose the games and called the terms and became the referee in any controversy.

Kite flying was the popular sport at this time and while the girls knitted and sewed we boys climbed the roofs to enter the competition. We had limited pocket money and it was not enough to buy all the materials we needed to make our kites but with *do* (a strong thread) we could cut other kite strings and try at least to appropriate the fallen prize. During the day someone was sure to fly a high kite and as soon as it was spotted other kites would go up to tangle in battle. Often three or four were hooked together and with strong thread and the right pull a heavy kite could cut the snarl and bring them all plunging to the street. Yog posted us all at different stations and as soon as a string was broken a long cry of *Bow-ee* would resound to our post. All eyes would focus skyward and we would try to follow the direction of the crazy kites. Everyone would rush to find the fallen booty and sometimes a bitter struggle would follow. The rule of fair play was that no one was to snatch a kite once someone had placed both hands on it but the rules were often broken. In the scramble which followed the kites hitting the ground more often than not a kite would be torn but sometimes one party was able to take it undamaged. During the rush to follow the kite would jump down from roof level to the next and each man looked out only for himself. My enthusiasm would never allow me to stand still while the others rushed to catch the prize and I would follow the sound.

Sometimes one of the kite hunters would forbid me to follow him. Stay there he would shout. I'll be back in just a moment. But other times boys tried to help me and took my hand while running. I scorned these gestures because they annoyed me and interfered with the game. Soon in the scramble of the play my handicaps indeed even my existence, were forgotten and with very occasional exceptions I was subject to the same rules and same fights. Though with this complete freedom came justice. I did develop better coordination.

One day though I came close to a very disastrous fall. I remember my sisters watching the rush and horrified to see me

climbering from roof to roof, shouted that I must stop. Conscious of their attention, I thought of where I was, lost my nerve and sense of balance, and started sliding on the tin roof. Luckily, the sloping roof flattened to a three inch ledge at the sides giving me enough pause to regain my balance and miss the two-storey fall. When my mother learned of this incident, strict orders followed, forbidding me to take part in further activities. I was, she said, to stay with my sisters and let them watch over me, and all my entreaties were ignored in my own best interests. I grew irritated and sullen, and my father, noticing this, finally resolved to let me learn my own lessons the hard way. He advised Mother not to be overly cautious. With this I gained my liberty and returned to my playmates.

I would often not see my mother from early morning when we congregated for sports, until dusk. We were served food at whichever house we happened to be during the lunch hour, and my oldest sister, Pom, who was thirteen and who might as well have been Mother, saw that we were washed and clean. We all obeyed and respected her for she was the only orderly influence in our disorderly group. Just as Yog was chief in the boys' games she led the girls, but when we played together she was the undisputed head.

We returned home only in the evening with healthy appetites for our eight thirty dinner but the dinner was not very leisurely, since there was yet another treat at the Mehta Gullie before bed. We assembled, tired and for the first time content to be still in the room of Bhabiji, my father's mother. To drowsy but eager listeners, she told stories stories which sparkled with her vivid narration. Sometimes they were about life on the farm when Lalaji was alive, and how the gathering of all the families made each dinner like a festival. More often, however she told us tales with a simple moral, which had been handed down like Aesop's fables. She would vary these with tales about the dishonest shepherd who called Lion too many times or of the farmer who gave his life to save his family and stories about Ram and Sita, the personifications of virtue — Ram and Sita were held up to us as models of manhood and womanhood. We were touched

and moved by their courage against the infamy of Rawan and they h gh lighted for us always the struggle between good and ■ l and the triumphs of courage and sacrifice over greed and wickedness. After listening to these reminiscences and folk tales we would eturn h me refreshed and promise ourselves to live up to the ideals of Ram and of S ■ But the next day we were fighting again over the fallen kites.

When were till li ing in our grandparents compound my f ther went on an inspection trip and took Mother leaving u in th charge of sister Pom. Once during our parents absence our g andfather turned from his evening v alk and when brother Om teased him for the prom d sweets he tapped him on the back with h cane. Brother Om thought th s punishment unjust ■ c my grandfather had promi ed him a bag of hard orange cand s. I was w th si ter Pom when b other Om came to her crying and t ld her. Grandfather beat me.

Si t r Pom was en aged for our parents had never b oken a pr m se. She g thered us together a d aid we were no longer to li e with our grandpare ts and tolerate uch insults. We were t pack our bel ngings and leave that ve y night. No one asked her where w were going but we gathered our c mbs and w sh cloths a d soon we we e on the road.

Hold ng each the s hand we drew courage and resisted our tea s. In ti t ly we turned towards Lawrence Gardens whi h w had s ted many tum s on eve ing v alks. It was about a m le away and as we got farther away from Grand father s hou ■ I wist d that sister Pom had let me tell someone we were lea ing. Then at least, there would have been a hope of ur ■ andparents plead ng and maybe Grandfather s apologizi g - and the we ould have stayed there without having our dig ity out aged.

We reached Lawrence Gard n around eight o clock and the clean, fresh air f om the thick tall grass which carpeted th h lly acres had a reviv ing influence. Si ter Pom bought us all a cup of Carry Home ic cream whi ch she said ould take ca of our d n cr. Then we sat down in on c rner u der the tall wide spreading trees and prepared to spend the night. As it

grew dark, all sounds subsided, and only the persistent chirp of the crickets remained to keep us company. In our intermittent drowsing we heard the striking of nine, ten, ten thirty.

Then to my relief, I heard the faint, familiar calls of one of the servants who had often accompanied us to this favourite spot. We were all awake now. The party edged closer, and the shouts grew louder. Still sister Pom didn't say anything. I wanted to shout back. Here we are but dreading sister Pom's reproach, I didn't. Even when they spotted us with the help of their torches sister Pom sat there immobile.

My uncle, who accompanied the party, scolded us for leaving and causing so much unnecessary concern. For all they knew, all six of us might have been kidnapped. But seeing his scolding was having no result he paused and stood there silent, looking at us. Then he gently suggested. Let's go home. But not until he assured sister Pom that Grandfather would make his apology to brother Om did she agree. We joined our hands, and with Uncle and servants trailing headed towards our Grandfather's house in the Mehta *Gullie*.

At the Foot of the Himalayas

IN September of 1942 my father was promoted and transferred to Rawalpindi which was only hundred and eighty miles north of Lahore. At first there was talk of only my father going to Pindi and the rest of the family staying behind in Lahore where my sisters were all enrolled in an excellent convent. But from the very outset we knew the fallacy of this arrangement. We had been a closely knit family and from the very beginning my father believed in home education just as much as in academic and he himself played an important part in this. So without any further argument it was decided to leave Lahore. Within a week of his order my father left and in early 1943 when I was ten was sent to Pindi a city with excellent climate being the main gateway to Kashmir leaving behind only my mother, the girls and Bhabiji.

In Punjab alone where more Indians were to be found in the higher circles than in any other province recent developments had made possible the election of an Indian to the position of Assistant Director of Public Health. My father because of his seniority and education had received this job in Pindi and with it the designation of a house. Here as in other big cities the government had reserved areas for the homes of high officials in the district which in the old days used to be Englishmen. We were delighted by the big government bungalow with a built-in office for my father. While the house was in place a little lap-dog, the domestic cat was excellent for raising chickens and buffaloes — our greatest source of milk and we were able to build a pool for the accommodation of thirty gills. For a while we even kept a cocker spaniel. With our family animal farm and the six servants plus the *dhobi* our laundryman and *chankard* or caretaker we had a

holding comparable in dignity to that of any other official in the Indian Government.

By regulation of the government the road traffic of Civil Lines the district where we lived was limited and for miles around it was quiet. The sticky heat of Lahore and the smoke filled Dadar district seemed almost grotesque in comparison with this natural setting. The cold and pricking wind which grazed the icy peaks of the mountains swept down over Rawalpindi bringing the vitality and vigour of the Himalayas. I had never felt more exhilarated, or healthier. The vivacity I had experienced flying kites and jumping roofs returned afresh.

The rest of the family were happy too. My sisters learned that there was a Presentation convent here as fine as Sacred Heart at Lahore. My brother was admitted to a good school also and my mother was happy to have buffaloes of her own.

We continued to live at Civil Lines until October 1945 and those three happy years stand out in my mind as a buffer between my stay in Bombay and the break up of India.

For the first time now I noticed how smoothly the difference in my father's and mother's attitudes towards my blindness had been bridged. My mother encouraged me to play and run as I chose and to go on excursions wherever I pleased in the district. I was no longer pampered. One day when I had not eaten my meal Mother gently scolded me, and then she gave me a banana to compensate for the small lunch. I told her I would eat it in a minute, and no sooner had she left the dining room than I turned around to offer it to our little cocker spaniel puppy Blackie. She swallowed part of it, but spat up the rest and there was no hiding what I had done. I was given a thrashing that day and made to clean up the mess. However much I valued my independence I did like the pampering too but I was learning that my mother had decided to treat me according to my choice of independence.

My sisters treated me with no more deference than did my mother. In the past they used to buy me sweets with their own pocket money and at the table whenever there wasn't enough of some tasty dish, I had priority. But not any more. In fact I

have a slight suspicion that the sweets they bought with my own pocket money were not always all delivered to me. I was not even indulged as the youngest. Usha had replaced me in this advantageous position.

The Presentation centre was located about two miles away from our home and at first this seemed to be at a prohibitive distance because my father couldn't take time off from his work to drive my sisters there. After consultation it was decided to buy each of the girls a bicycle. For the past five years the women in India had enjoyed increasing independence thanks to the nature of Mahatma Gandhi's campaign, still not many women had taken to riding bicycle by themselves on the streets.

Since brother Om's bicycle was falling apart he was given a new one and I prevailed upon my father to let me have one of the other Om's. He had bought one and it took me many days to learn to ride it and then it broke. I repaired the bicycle. With an occasional direction from a servant I kept on working at it until I had the wheels straight and put new spokes in them and the pedals. I had the seat. After this bicycle had been my toy for almost a month and a half and I had well spotted myself with grease it was fit to be put on the road on a again.

Now I started learning how to ride it. This was very difficult since I was afraid to ask anyone to teach me for fear the bicycle would be taken away from me as being too old and dangerous. Each morning I would leave home and try to ride it. The compound No. 100 would I begin then I would fall and would have to pedal time to time holding minor injuries but finally the bicycle. But gradually I learned to balance myself and falls came less frequently.

One morning when my sisters were riding to school I decided that I would try to follow them keeping at a safe distance. I knew the streets would be empty at that early hour and nothing would confuse the sound of my sisters talking to one another in the quiet of the morning. I was sure I could take my direction from their voices. At first everything went just as I had imagined. We didn't meet with much traffic and in spite of occasional

difficulties in hearing my sisters when they turned a corner, I followed them right up to the gate of their school

Even if I had been concentrating on remembering the turns of the twisting road, it probably would have been impossible for me to find my way back. As it was I was afraid to disclose myself to my sisters by shouting. I lost my nerve and while I was still thinking about what to do they were out of reach, inside the schoolyard.

Then I heard the bells and the retreating laughter of the girls as I walked around the wall outside the school. I thought about the Dadar School. Its wall had been high and impressive too, and no one inside the wall paid too much heed to what went on outside. Even the bells seemed to fit the atmosphere. They sounded much like the church bells I had heard on Sundays at Bombay.

I put my bicycle near the wall and sat down beside it on a patch of grass, leaning my back against the wall. When I was not dozing I let my thoughts drift. After what seemed a long while the noon hour arrived. I heard the noise, the laughter and the playing of games. I knew I was the only boy in that whole feminine vicinity, and I felt quite out of place. I wondered how it would be to find myself back in Bombay competing in races and swinging on swings. How noisy that place sometimes had been! Abdul? He seemed nicer now. I longed to be back there. Soon the girls' play hour was over and they returned inside. But my thoughts lingered on.

I awoke with a jar. The bells were ringing three. It must be time for them to come out. I thought, and I picked my bicycle off the ground and stood up. When my sisters arrived, they were astonished, and I was overwhelmed with their questions — how I had got there, what I had been doing all day, why I hadn't told them. But I was saved the embarrassment of answering because their questions followed in such quick succession. Then we started on the journey home, and this time sister Nunu kept one of her hands on my handle bar as we rode alongside each other. All the time I was thinking of what my mother would say, and I dreaded her reproaches.

shops, and in the village huts. Thus I came to know a point of view completely different from my own family's.

Even when we were not on tours I would spend hours in Ram Saran's quarters, talking to him about the war. His quarters were a very small room located at the very farthest end of our estate. Stretching my arms, I could almost reach from wall to wall of his room, and the length was not much greater. Yet within that room Ram Saran cooked, slept and kept all his belongings. On one side stood his small cot which just fitted in the length of the quarters and I remember wondering what Ram Saran would have done if he had been one of the Sikhs, six and a half feet tall. At the other side of the room was built a small *chula* a charcoal burner over which he did all his cooking. I would often visit him in the evening during his off duty hours and while I sat on a small board, leaning against the cot he would cook and now and then I could persuade him to let me taste one of his pancake like *rotis* if I promised not to tell my mother.

Ram Saran hated Britishers and he said the British officers whom my father had replaced used to return from their clubs at all hours of the night. In spite of being off duty he would have to stay up waiting for their return for frequently they would be quite unable even to unlock the door. Ram Saran, retiring after he had seen them to bed would still be expected by the clerks to be on time next morning for his office duty, for he had to please the clerks as well as his officers.

Then Ram Saran had no use for war. The prices had gone up his salary had not. He was having a hard time and he attributed all this to the British Government. He was a great admirer of Subash Chunder Bose, for he was sure Bose had acted rightly in starting the Indian National Army on the Japanese side and trying thus to undermine the British. Ram Saran had no doubt in his mind that the Axis powers would be victorious. He could read Urdu very well, and each evening he would run down to the home of one of his friends who subscribed to a morning Urdu paper and bring it to his quarters. While I sat he would read me the pro-Nazi paper, and I was very much

careful with the clothes, and had never received any complaints. As the prices had risen, they had to take more and more customers which forced them to work as fast as they could from early morning until late at night. Her daughter, while ironing an expensive *sari* had scorched it badly that very afternoon they had gone to the customer and reported the damage but the customer had been furious and had refused to accept the *sari*. Now the *dhobi's* family was expected to make good the loss. A hundred and fifty *rupees* she said. Where can we get the money? We won't make that much in two months' time. I was moved and feeling helpless and awkward without even saying a word of consolation I left.

I told Ram Saran about it and asked what I should have done but he added to my discomfort by remaining silent. I couldn't approach my mother for it seemed it was becoming a habit with me to tell her some new sad tale each day and then try to enlist her help for the *malis* our gardener or the boy who took care of the cows. So next day I asked sister Pom who kept all our money to give me all my savings five *rupees* at the time. She wanted to know why, but according to the rules she did not insist and gave me my money. I put it in an envelope and asked Ram Saran if he would take it to the *dhobi's* family but he did not want to take the responsibility. He said some day my mother would find out, and might think he had encouraged me, and all my assurance to the contrary had no effect. Finally I took the envelope and gave it to the youngest in the family who was only five and asked him to give it to his mother. Next day the envelope was returned to my mother and at the dinner table she questioned me. I disclosed the whole matter and to my great relief, all my family seemed to be as touched as I had been. All my sisters as well as my brother were willing to pool our savings and give them to the *dhobi's* family, but my father said he would look into it himself and that we need not worry.

When I saw the *dhobi's* family again they were just as shy as I was and the girls who had greeted me before with lively talk remained silent but after their first awkward words of gratitude,

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we were again on the same terms When Ram Saran heard about this incident he was very happy and gave me a piece of his roti without my even asking him and that night he read a longer chapter than usual from *Ramayana*

The Juti

It was fifteenth of June and the cold winds of Rawalpindi had been replaced by the valley heat wave. It was hot and sultry outside, and the temperature was 106 degrees although it was not yet eleven. The blazing sun heated the flat roof until we felt like pottery figures in a kiln yet there was something singularly cold in the house.

Ashok, my younger brother had been seriously ill for two days, and the lively activity which marks the home of a child was now suspended and a depressing emptiness haunted the large house. Symptoms of his sickness were few and made no sense. All that could be determined was that his temperature was above 102 degrees and did not change at all.

I had gone out to feed the chickens, and when I was through, hot and perspiring I went straight to the drawing room. All my sisters sat on the couch. Gian Chand tells me Ashok has been taken to the hospital. What's the matter? Do they know what he has?

After a painful silence sister Pom answered in a firm and controlled voice, He has meningitis.

I was stunned and suddenly felt chilly. All at once the house seemed cold and desolate. Only the ceaseless ticking of the clock on the mantelpiece disturbed the stillness.

I sat down behind the couch. I was not yet four when meningitis blinded me. Ashok was only a year old. What if he should die? I must do something I thought, but the apathy was contagious. Lunch time arrived and no one ate anything. With the sound of every car on the street outside the tension heightened, and my heart would throb violently. That might be Father. I would think bringing us news and I was sure that in every mind this hope was foremost.

we moved forward to the back of the house and sister Pom cried, It's Blackie!

Panditji who was head clerk of my father's office was standing beside her. What's the matter, Panditji? sister Pom asked.

I don't know, Bahanji. I was working in the office when I heard her.

I could hear Blackie's short rapid gasps and a sound like scuffling gravel as she writhed between spasms. Nimi bent to stroke her, but the yelps only grew louder.

Leave her alone, Bahanji — she may bite. Panditji continued. Do you know when she was born?

The same day as Ashok. I murmured.

I thought as much, he said. Then he went into a long narration, but I was too depressed to listen.

I would catch fragments of his words though, as he said, Their two souls were born on the same day and since they are both sick on the same day only one of them must die. He sketched the details which led him to this conclusion and I was reminded of the *pandit* who had sat on the porch reading my palm, pretending to keep me from following his intricate reasoning, yet muttering loud enough to evoke my admiration.

No one had the strength or courage to contradict Panditji, and he, taking our resigned attitude as respect and admiration was encouraged to go on further until he had calculated the exact hours within which the dog must die if my brother were to be saved. He fixed the time only an hour away. Stupefied at his reasoning and by our misery we all stood there and before we knew it we were anxiously waiting and I was even praying for the death of the dog who only two days ago had been my constant companion running behind the bicycle, fetching a ball, and speaking for food. She was a member of the family, not like the chickens, fish or buffaloes. Now I was feverishly longing for her death. Forever, I thought, we were to depend on *pandits'* advice and follow their instructions. Whatever sinister opinions I had formed about *pandits* and *hakims* now vanished, and belief in Panditji's confident assertions seemed to be the only escape from that gloom-ridden house.

He was saying She's got to die a natural death You can't kill her as if that had occurred to us We were too confused too weak to depend on our thinking or even our ability to stand there longer Yet determinedly we stayed with Panditya to watch the painful struggle With each cry which was louder and more vigorous or with each deep gasping pant I would become thoughtful Maybe she will live and Ashok Blackie lingered on and though I winced at each penetrating whine I could have no pity for her

When Panditya had repeated his argument several times and could think of nothing more to say even he stopped Embarrassed probably that his stock of ideas was so soon depleted he shouted for Qasim Ali who immediately bustled from the office at his command

Bring an old shoe he said and a long nail Qasim Ali obeyed at once and rather than spend time hunting up an old shoe he offered one of his own *juti*s Then Panditya pounded a nail into the centre of the slipper like shoe Next Panditya and Qasim Ali sat down on the ground each placing a *juti* lightly under the head of the nail and balanced the *juti* loosely between them

What followed left a deep imprint on my mind for it was incredibly ridiculous Panditya a meek and pious man detested by his birth to belong to the religious stratum of Hindu society heaped such curses on the *juti* accused it of such immorality and shouted with such venom and all this in front of my sisters that we were aghast Indeed such was the strength of that masculine throat that the howls of poor Blackie became inaudible

You *juti* he shouted and began to curse it foully By your mother's name you must tell the truth! Tell us the truth! Tell us the truth! Whose soul will be taken? Whose soul - do you fear? He intoned each syllable until even the *juti* could not possibly have misheard them Then he turned around to us I am going to call names he said and at the name of the soul which is going to be taken today this *juti* will spit

Blackie's yelps seemed more anguished than ever and she

THE JUTI

whimpered as though exhausted Her sides heaved with each breath of the heavy air, yet no one even thought of giving her water

Panditji intoned monotonously, Is it Mohan Lal, Krishan Lal Gani Chand, Tara Singh until at last he called Is it Ashok Kumar? A deadening silence followed Had the *juti* spun? I wondered Sick and dizzy with emotion I was afraid to ask Panditji resumed, Is it Taraknath is it Blackie?

Then I heard the shoe hit the ground and Panditji got up You have nothing to worry about And without further ado he went back into the office I took my handkerchief from my pocket and swabbed at the perspiration which ran down my forehead We stood in apathy five minutes longer Then Blackie gave one far reaching cry and a last violent spasm

With her life extinguished, there was not much left for us to do Slowly we walked away as if from an uncovered grave, leaving Qasim Ali to dispose of Blackie's body If anyone cried, it was silently, for I did not hear them

We went into the drawing room and began our wait for Father's return Half an hour later around four o'clock he arrived As he came into the drawing room no one asked a question He said only Everything is all right The lumbar puncture went off without a mishap

The news we had been waiting for ever since eleven o'clock had arrived but the utter desolation of the house was unchanged Are you all exhausted? my father asked

Daddyji, I broke in, why should this have happened to both of us?

I can't explain, he said humbly

In the silence that followed we heard the ticking clock on the mantelpiece

From Mela to the Murree Hills

IN India where hunger and poverty are the reigning monarchs and where all are at the mercy of any army of mosquitoes and flies the sanitary conditions are at subhuman standards. The Health Department has a monumental job to perform. It not only must try to prevent outbreaks of epidemics by striking at the sources of poverty which cause them but once they are in the open it must confine their spread. For this purpose the British Government gave the Health Department top priority and a large number of personnel.

As an Assistant Director of Public Health in the divisions of Rawalpindi and Multan my father toured the districts in the two divisions and whenever an epidemic like cholera or plague overtook any district area he would immediately go there sometimes on a half hour's notice. He might be gone for as long as a week or a fortnight at a time. Since I was not attending school I was permitted to accompany him now and then provided his tour did not take him into an epidemic area.

One of these tours took me to a *mela*—a fair of provincial importance which was held only seventy miles away from Pindi and where my father was expected to go and make sure that good sanitary standards were observed. Sister Nirmal and Cousin Yogesh were visiting us in Pindi went too and the peon we took with us was Qasim Ali, a pretentious imposing man conservative in outlook and very conscious of his dignified position as the attendant of an Assistant Director of Public Health.

As we pulled away from Pindi bound for the *mela* Cousin Yogesh and my father's secretary sat in the front seat while Sister Nirmal and I took the back with Qasim Ali. He immediately started telling us about the *mela*.

It is too crowded, miss, he said, and you have to be careful. For ten years he had accompanied officers to the *mela* and he said he had seen many, many terrible things happen. Farmers had no respect for his uniform and refused to make way for him. He had seen children, just our age, separated from their parents, never to be found again. In his paternal condescending way, he asked us to stay near him always. Sister Nimi, wishing to avoid argument with him, kept on nodding and agreeing. He warned us not to buy anything from the street hawkers, for it wasn't safe, and he did not want to be held responsible by my mother.

Incessantly, he talked, now demanding respect for his judgment, now planting fear, until sister Nimi switched places with Yog, who immediately started telling Qasim Ali about his experiences at the Karuk Chheter *mela* and whether Qasim Ali smiled or not. Yog laughed at each, only to relate one more daring. Even sister Nimi leaned back from her seat in front to hear Yog and thus encouraged him.

A *mela*, said Yog, is one place where you can let yourself go, do what you want when you want. It was the freedom he loved, and once, he said, to frighten his sister Lil, he had persuaded a snake charmer to let him have a venomless cobra to wrap around his neck. Amid Qasim Ali's horror and sister Nimi's and my amusement, we finally reached the *mela*, and our car was immediately directed by a policeman to our pavilion.

After unloading there, we left our separate tent to join the press of the crowd. As we approached the main thoroughfare and as the crowd grew thicker, pushing from all directions, our progress grew slower and slower. The hot sun beat down as if to establish its ascendancy and the smell which rose from the sweating bodies was equalled only by the aroma of steaming food.

Qasim Ali, dressed in the woollen gold braid uniform and big red turban of an official, refused to mingle with the crowd. Playing on sister Nimi's good sense, he tried to restrain us, only to be outtalked by Yog, and drowned by the crowd. Doggedly, Qasim Ali followed us as long

dignified movement could compete with Yog's agile lead. Then Yog suggested that we eat. Sister Nimi looking over her shoulder for Qasim Ali and seeing that we had lost him, agreed. Now only the shrill notes of the bagpipe could be heard above the roar of the crowd and once in a while, the voice of an energetic street hawker would beckon one and all to his *reh*—a wheelbarrow his shout replacing the cautions of Qasim Ali. We finally made our way to one of these *reh*s and each of us folding banana leaves to make a cup, was served hot *alu-chhole* (potato and chick peas in a pungent sauce), small wheat pancakes and a sweetmeat made of flour, butter and sugar.)

As we stood there licking our fingers, an incident occurred which to this day reminds me of the utter degradation imposed by poverty. The usual particulars I gathered later when the incident was related to my father. Among the crowd stood a mother with five children, one a boy about eight and four girls varying in age from five to ten. The healthy boy was heartily devouring his *alu-chhole* and a kingfisher. As his four sisters whose thin, knobby legs were too weak to resist the push of the throngs stood with their hands joined, their mouths half-open and their hungry eyes turned to their brother, they made a piteous sight. Yet not one of them asked the brother or the mother for a morsel of food. Sister Nimi, noticing them, asked the little girls what was the matter. They looked at her uncomprehendingly. Then sister Nimi, turning to the little boy, said, "Why don't you share with your sisters? Bewildered, he turned to his mother, who appeared scarcely stronger than her daughters. Raising her tired eye to Nimi's, he said in a weary voice, "Somehow, I have to survive. And pointing to the five little girls, added, "They will have to go first."

Sister Nimi was stunned but before she could do anything, the press of the crowd behind us swept us away from the family.

We continued to mingle with the crowd, making our way from show to shop, from stand to stand, where we purchased the kien gifts for the family, and as darkness came on, tired and exhausted, we started picking our way back to the pavilion.

Beyond our pavilion, we saw the thick cluster of tall loquat trees and wishing to avoid Qasim Ali sister Nimi suggested that we go over to them. The trees were loaded with ripe loquats, and Yog ignoring the sign NO TRESPASSING RS 150 FINE asked us to wait while he ran to the neighbouring inspector's cottage to borrow a flashlight and a basket. Before Nimi could protest he was gone. Soon he returned. Then while he climbed the tree, he asked sister Nimi to stand lookout with the torch, and signal him if she found anyone approaching. He asked me to hold up the basket while he filled it with loquats. With his rapid movements from tree to tree, quickly the basket was full to the brim and he led us to a patch of grass hidden by the trees. Abandoning all caution we began eating the loquats. Yog was his cheery self, and the time passed all too quickly.

An hour or so later, his unrestrained laughter betrayed us to the *chonkidar*, who, pointing to the pile of seeds, told us it would do no good to deny our guilt, and choked off Yog's hastily contrived defence. But just then Qasim Ali arrived and drawing himself erect demanded of the watchman: Don't you know they're children of the Assistant Director of Public Health?

But if the *chonkidar's* arrival was disconcerting Qasim Ali's was no more pleasing. All the way back to the pavilion, he scolded us. I've been looking for you for hours, he said. What if something had happened to Miss Nimi? Who would have been blamed for it? I, who else? What if something had happened to him? he said, pointing to me. What would Dr Sahib say? Would I have my job left? Would I have anything left? Don't you have any thought for your servants? And on and on he went, now sulking, now scolding.

What have you been doing? he said. Where did you eat? Sister Nimi muttered without thinking. At one of the *haltwans*.

Didn't I tell you that food was no good? What if you get sick by tomorrow? And where did you wash those loquats, Yog Sahib? Yog tried to crack a joke by saying, Why, Qasim Ali, it rained only yesterday. But Qasim Ali was not amused. As we reached the pavilion, however, he simmered down, for Father had returned. Yog later told us that when he went back the

following day to pick up his torch he saw Qasim Ali heartily feasting on loquats and that his pile of seeds far surpassed ours.

The next day all of us went with Father on his inspection. It was still early in the morning and as we neared the streets leading to the main thoroughfare they were deserted. The restful silence bore witness to the frenzied activity of the night before and only when we had almost reached the tents which housed the temporarily liberated peasants their wives and children was the lull interrupted by the children hustling to fetch water washing and getting prepared for the last day of the *mela*.

My father's staff of inspectors who stood by the tents greeted my father and he inquired about unusual cases which might forewarn him of an epidemic. As each inspector replied in the negative we felt a keen sense of joy. All morning was passed revisiting tent after tent and then in the middle of the day.

The *halwa* had already reached their stalls and were fanning their fires while apprentices scarcely in their teens washed the pans, hoisted the canopies and with cheap coloured papers and balloons decorated the shops. Some *halwa* had already started preparing the batter and I could hear the huge spoons slapping rhythmically in pots up and down the middle of the day and the inspectors walking to and fro asking to see the cloths which we used to protect the *thalis* and demanding to inspect milk and vegetables.

Watching the *halwas* I was reminded of the family we had seen the day before the incident which had been forgotten during our shopping and excursion for loquats. The same thought must have occurred to Sister Nimi also for she began to relate the incident to my father. She told him how shocked she had been, and how we had lost the family in the push of the crowd before food could be bought for them.

My father told us that during his inspections he had encountered case after case where the girls were allowed to starve before a boy went hungry. Try, he said, to see it from their point of view. A girl constitutes a heavy responsibility for a poor peasant. He is charged with a husband and often the success of the household depends on the size of

dowry the poor man can offer. He is forced, therefore, to borrow money from usurers at exorbitant rates of interest, to insure his daughter's happiness. Sometimes, he went on, the debt persists years after the marriage, yet according to the prevailing custom, the parents of the bride must never eat, or even take a drink of water in the village where a daughter is married.

A son, on the other hand, can be relied upon to help on the farm from the time he is ten, and is also a security against sickness and old age. He takes care of his aged parents and assumes responsibility for the whole family on his father's death.

My mind went back to the time when my parents in hushed voices first considered the chances of finding suitable matches for my sisters. We were comparatively rich people, and yet the responsibility of finding a husband, providing a dowry, and seeing that the girl was happily settled was evidently a problem for us, too.

Now the people were starting to fill the middle of the street, and the street hawkers had resumed their shouting, their voices somewhat hoarser than the day before. That afternoon we ate our lunch at the *halwais* and even Father joined us. We shopped some more, and tired but happy, we started for home.

As we eased our way through the crowds, my sister described to me the torn and shabby dresses, freshly dyed, which clothed the people.

Only the day before, Yog had made us laugh and chat and events with Qasim Ali, though tedious at times, had continued to amuse us. But now, even though the bagpipes still played and the men and women responded to the gay music, simultaneously we all became thoughtful, and wondered about the life each villager had left behind to attend this yearly festival.

Even Yog's lightheartedness was dampened. As we left the *mela* that night, my father did most of the talking, answering our inquiries about the people who did not live as we.

During the summer months when the direct rays of the hot sun would press down on the level plains, we would follow the cold, reviving wind of the winter to its mountain home.

stations I believe are a phenomenon peculiar to India and more prominently so since the British raj. Unable to bear the heat of the plain, where only a hundred or so miles away the towering and majestic Himalayas beckoned cool and green. Englishmen established small hill stations on suitable spots in the lower and middle range, traversing along the fifteen hundred mile range from east to west. For many with means these hill stations became the resort where they would take their vacation in their briefcases and still enjoy all the life and scenery and freshness of the mountains. Indeed during the British raj there were two capitals for India, one in Delhi during the winter and one in Simla for the summer.

For the British civil servants in Rawalpindi, Murree Hills was the Simla and during the summer all the high echelons would seek refuge in this small and compact town which lay only forty miles away from Pindi. We would start for Murree Hills every June, all nine of us and a servant packed into a car with our bedrolls hoisted and strapped on the roof, our suitcases bulging from the half-open trunk and the small British flag flying in front.

While my father often had to spend much of his time on mountain trips from Murree Hills to Pindi and touring the villages in his district we would all stay in the hill in a small secluded cottage built in a steep canyon. In this summer vacation we lost all concern of time and the daily mornings would be spent taking long walks over twisted miles of winding trail or riding horses for hours.

One day, my mother, being before the sun was high enough to reach over the mountain tops, we left our cottage for a walk. Sister Norma and I were separated from the rest of the family and as we wandered on a steeply sloping road which narrowed to a rugged trail when we passed the last house. I wondered for the first time why the estately mountains possess the thoughts of mountain crabs the world over, why adventuresome souls hungry for the beauty and solitude of the lonely peaks try to conquer the unconquerable, even though they perish in the attempts. As we tried to make our way up the rocky cliff gripping the

strong, sharp edges of the jagged rocks, and while sister Nimi nervously tried to make me feel the sweep of mountains and distant valley, I was seized with an insatiable urge to see these mountains for myself, to climb them by myself, and to aspire to the highest summits with the men who scale them

I wanted sister Nimi to stop her description. It gave me the same feeling of being left alone that I was to experience at the hill station of Gulmarg, Simla and Mussoorie. Stop it, Nimi! I said. Please stop it. She broke off in the middle of her sentence, and I could tell she was hurt. No sooner had I said this than I felt ashamed at giving way to such rudeness. She was taking such pains and trying so hard to make me feel with her. As I thought of this and of my ingratitude my frustration grew and intensified, until I would have given anything to have retracted my words. Sister Nimi immediately regained her poise and changed the subject to how we would find our way back to the cottage.

Day after day was spent in the luxuriant surroundings of these cliffs and canyons. In the evening however, we found diversion along the main street of Murree Hills. The Mall Road was about two miles long with a quarter mile stretch in the centre lined on both sides by small shops with Western style show windows. The salesmen were well groomed prototypes of their fellow tradesmen in England with jovial extravert mannerisms and hearty handshakes. All the summer inhabitants of Murree Hills flocked to the Mall Road after six o'clock strolling up and down until they had sized up the bargains in the show windows, and greeted and chatted with their friends from the valley. Wearied by their walk students might stop in at the coffee house, where all the current political ideas clashed over *café au lait* and roasted nuts, until the growing heat of arguments rivalled the noise of the Mall.

A slender street sloped from the Mall Road like an outflung arm and along this street was the Indian bazaar with large baskets spread out from one end to the other half hiding vegetable vendors and the dilapidated shops of cobblers and blacksmiths. Economically minded housewives and domestic

stood arguing with these vendors trying to whittle down the price of a tu nip or t mato a p ce or ts o

As I heard the vendors barg ining day in and day out I n ver cea ed to wonder at the incredible stamina of their vocal chords. Their whol utter- was based on ne trade secret how well they coul d out argue their cust mers. This bazaar was the Mall Road of the poo whe th well to-d only sent their servants so that th y m ght hav fre h egetables fo th ir kitchens.

On the upp r Mall Road a egment of thi bazaar could be felt for at each e d of the Mall tood coolies trying to enlist cu t mers to rent h r e or to tak rickshaws. When I first arrived i Murree Hill I had e the h ard of n r s en ricksha. One of th first days wh s ster Pom and I wer strolling the Mall I heard the h rp rhythm c slap f ba e feet on the ough hilly r ad and a clipped v ice aying Faster - I mu t keep an ap- po ntm nt.

Wh t is it? I a ked.

A ricksh w she s id. Then he e pla ned that two men were s tt g r ading the p p e s while f u ool s pull d the rickshaw up th ste p st t.

After that d y wh e we walk d I would strain my ears to h ar that sound until I gr w s p ofi nt that I c uld e di tinguish th a king ga ps of the two men in front who bo e the brunt of the i kshaw s we ght like buggy ho ses from the co r e he vy breaths g of th t o m n wh p hed from behind. S met me during ou walk we would sta d by the ra li g at som high point and li ten to arguments betwe n sub- mi s s coolies begg ng f r an n a apiece mo and com mand i g u t me s wh wo ld walk calmly nto their homes shutting the hea y doo s behind them.

My father told us that the e ool es li ed in the m untain all the year r und and u a d th t me e t cold snows a d st rms in their shabby cl thes and w th cant supplies. Often he said they succumb to the r gg d cl m and stre uous life e en bef re they r a h fo ty and th y c n sur ive at mo t only ten to fife n years of steady icksh w work.

In the even ngs we would return f ome tired and exhaust d

from excursions on the mountains and walks on the Mall Road. We might linger by the fireplace, pressing close together, warming our hands and rubbing noses and ears to rid them of numbness. If the fire was burning low, we roasted chestnuts, and used them to drive the chilblains from our fingers.

Then one by one we would retire to bed, and if the cold, icy wind were not blowing too strongly, we would leave a crack of our window open through which, faintly, we could hear the low, sad melodies played in the limited range of the flute, so typical of the mountaineers' music. Occasionally the powerful roar of the wind would obscure the low notes of the melody, and we would tax every sense to capture them, now barely succeeding, now failing altogether. Sometimes in the far distance, the fading sound of the flute would be replaced by some hillman's melancholy chant, swelling and sinking with the whims of the gusty wind.

With the passage of time, spectacular as well as simple happenings become mere items in the catalogue of memory, yet there is a power and strength in simple experiences which makes their impressions persist long after you have left the mountains and returned to the complex routine of the plains. I have spent almost every summer in the mountains, and after the break up of India, even the icy winters when the ground was covered knee deep with snow. Each time I have returned, I have felt that same passionate longing revive to hear again the mellifluous notes of the solitary tunes of the mountain dwellers, or walk undisturbed with only thoughts as companions.

The Dinner Table School

BEGINNING with our stay in Pindi several new institutions came into our lives and none more enduring than our dinner table school. My three older sisters had entered college early at the age of fourteen and came home exhilarated by the new ideas of Western culture they encountered. Curious about Christianity and Western philosophy they plied Father—who had travelled extensively in both Europe and America with questions and for the lack of convenience it was decided to hold all discussions at dinner time.

We ate our dinner at half past eight and where before, in Lahore we had rushed off to Bhabiji our grandmother to hear her stories now we lingered at the dinner table while the servant cleared away.

At first these dinner table discussions revolved around my sisters who told of their college work under the supervision of the gentle Mother Superior and the Sisters. They would ask Father to tell them about Christianity and democratic ways in England and so met me their questions assumed the simplicity of asking only for instance if all Westerners were as quiet and gentle as the Sisters. It was soon clear that my sisters were subconsciously seeing the West as it was personified by the nun and their reading was making them believe that England comprised the whole Western Hemisphere. They said if you understood the struggle between the downtrodden workers and the industrialists nineteenth and nineteenth-century England you could understand the identical conflict which spread to all the Western countries and to them a look at the British Empire explained the whole imperial government of the Romans.

To correct such oversimplification Father told us of his experiences in Europe and America. He told us about the great democracy in America the tyranny of Russia the fascism of

central Europe and gradually we gained a whole new perspective of Christian society. We saw variety and diversity for the first time behind the white skin.

As my father described life in the Western world we were all moved with the desire to see it for ourselves. Gradually the conversations at night turned into an imaginary tour of the European countries and America with all of us packed into a big lorry. We would see the night clubs of France and hear the music festivals of Scandinavian countries and American jazz bands all at one time. Then we would imagine ourselves to be tasting Italian spaghetti, French wines and American hot dogs.

I do not recall when this casual narration of anecdotes and imaginary voyages became the actual planning of a tour of the hemisphere. Since we were so large a family we decided we could not afford to go on a ship or a plane. We must have a lorry built in Pindi and drive to England. To be sure all roads did not lead to London yet for a nominal fee our lorry could be ferried over any water we would have to cross. The next problem was where we would find such a lorry. We paid a visit to the Chevrolet dealer in Pindi who promised to install an engine in the body which we would have built. Many nights were spent drawing designs for this vehicle: how the beds would fold in, where exactly we would place the water tank, and cook our food. Every attempt must be made to save space. Father said yet every provision must be made to meet emergencies in mountains and deserts.

At last it was decided to call in the carpenters for consultation. They advised that the lorry would have to be two stories high, the body alone would cost about fifteen thousand *rupees* then a little over four thousand dollars. These carpenters built a wooden model of the lorry, which we placed on view on the mantelpiece. There the matter rested and our next question was what we were going to do once we got there.

My sisters, Father said, could dress in costumes from the peasant to simple *dhoti* and glass bangles to the luscious *sari* of Benares and gold necklaces. We would hire a stage and develop an act depicting a scene of typical Indian village life.

He told us how naive Westerners were about the Indian way of life or indeed about all Asian peoples. White men had curiosity, he said, but they were wanting in sources of information. To supplement my sister's performances therefore he would lecture about Indian philosophy and history and — if he could find an audience — tropical medicine. We were to take pictures exemplifying various facets of Indian life from north to south and east to west from simple villages to modern cities.

Even though British people had ruled India for two hundred years, my father said they had not been able to reach its soul or feel its heartbeat. While it was true that many factors entered into this lack of understanding on the part of the British, the main reason was that even the simplest and poorest Indian peasant was a proud and reserved person and his traditional ways which the British thoughtlessly discarded as mere superstition comprised his whole being and gave him virtue and strength. In his person were reflected centuries of faith and suffering and in part he summed up Indian history.

One of these days my father went on in his enthusiasm that present struggle for independence will culminate in freedom for India and indeed for all subject nations. If all the nations around the globe are to live in a harmonious world a better understanding among their peoples is imperative. Our job then was to interpret for the Westerner the life of an average Indian and to capture his spirit. But to do this we ourselves had to understand him. His mind was simple and straightforward, not confused by more than a few considerations. It worked on a white-or-black, this-or-that basis. It was this mind that we should try to clarify for Westerner. He pointed to the servants and said when an Englishman entered the house they would retreat into their shell because they associated authority with white skin and a brusque voice. They felt inferior to the Englishman and even after his long rule they had not begun to assimilate this foreign element. While the servants would argue freely with my mother and even with my uncles, they shied from speaking before my father. He attributed this to his holding a post previously held by Englishmen. Peasants

in other districts, he said, were the same way, and whenever he went on tours, he had to make special efforts always to speak Panjabi, and thus win their confidence

My mother hinted that this dream of travel was all very well if he had the money. But my father replied that industrious people with imaginative ideas were sure to be successful. We would surely be able to make enough money to finance the trip. Every day I looked forward to dinner and to hearing that easy, confident, reassuring voice, interrupted by occasional questions. What had started out as a narration of interesting experiences and then transformed itself into daydreaming now had assumed the character of serious study. My father bought some pamphlets and books on Europe and India and after our meal he would read aloud in English stopping only to explain various points in Hindi and colour them with his experiences.

I would understand very little of what he read and hours would pass by without my comprehending any more than the verbs I had learned at Dadar School. Sometimes in passing he mentioned such names as da Vinci, Copernicus or Voltaire and I often wondered what lay behind these names. Hearing them spoken at our house served to accentuate my curiosity and arouse my insatiable desire to go to America and to get on with my schooling. Sometimes I couldn't restrain myself, however, and would interrupt to ask him questions or to explain or translate, which he invariably did. For me these readings were like scriptures reinforcing my belief that we would all one day pack into the lorry and leave India — my family to tour Europe and I to attend Perkins.

Even though no definite date had been set for going abroad, my father had accumulated a leave of a year and a half to be used for just this purpose and I never doubted for a moment the eventual reality of our trip.

Meanwhile my academic progress was still at a standstill while the other children were going happily to school. As I was to learn years later immediately following my blindness my father had written in his diary: I will sell my soul to give him the

highest education possible. But his willingness to make sacrifices and his unwavering determination to treat me as a normal child and endow me with the same opportunities as his other children made me feel no more to be frustrated.

He had observed that in India the most self-sufficient blind people were musicians. Indeed one of them, Master Kohli, had tutored my mother in Lahore while I was in Bombay. So now in Rawalpindi my father hired a tutor for me.

This teacher, Pandit Hukam Chand, called Panditji, belonged like many Indian musicians to the old school of Indian music at which he had gained his training not by attending a conservatory but by living with his teacher and attending to all his demands. In accordance with tradition he became a disciple of his master, extra time concealed knowledge by massaging his feet, cooking his food, washing his clothes, and submitting to his will.

The *guru* imparted to his disciple his understanding of particular *raga*—cal patterns for tunes and music which he the *guru* had received from his *guru*, who in turn had received it from him. It was like the prescription of the *hakims* never written but entrusted to the safety of memory alone and passed by word of mouth to the most devoted pupil through a long impressive line of generations.

Panditji, regretting the hanging society which was undermining his prerogatives, was forced to impart for a fee these secret which were his legacy acquired under unbearable conditions and through hardship which only he could relate. However much he might value them, money he could not quite reconcile himself to sharing the secrets of Indian music.

It was not surprising then that Panditji, in his bitterness, had also become an uncrupulous man. He came to teach me not because he expected to have an affinity for me as a *guru* might for his disciple but as a choice forced upon him which had to be performed however detestable.

Panditji came three times a week in the afternoon to give his lessons. The primary thing in music he would say is to get your voice trained so that it can go from octave to octave with

out difficulty. Thus the whole hour would be spent in exercising the vocal chords, and when he departed I would be left hoarse and breathless.

While I sang he sat playing the *tablas* small drumlike instruments. With each thump on the tightly stretched hides my heart throbbed. Panditji had a very short temper and I knew that if I were to miss a beat he would go into a tirade wishing it were the old days so he could take a stick to me just as his *guru* had to him.

Since Indian music has no harmony and centuries of change have left it untouched, understanding of rhythm and voice training are the major requisites for proficiency. And as Indian music is built on various scales each scale definitely designated because of the mood it creates to the appropriate hour of day or night, the rest of our time was spent studying exactly which scales created what moods. In strict, classical Indian music once a particular scale has been chosen say *bhairon* for instance which creates a melancholy mood because of its minor quality and is thus appropriate to the early quiet hours of the dawn no deviation from the accepted scale can be permitted. So the technique is to evolve various tunes constructed on particular *ragas*.

Thus our time was spent in learning rhythm training the voice and gaining appreciation of the various *ragas*. Panditji was very careful to drill me in a *raga* day after day, so that I would avoid the pitfall of introducing a foreign note and thus corrupting the purity of the music.

He pointed out to me that the film industries who were more interested in producing popular melodies were determined to undermine the classical music and it would be left to the younger generation to see that the classical form remained pure.

He imparted his knowledge more as favours than lessons. If I joined him in disparaging the pseudomusic of the film industry, he would feel well disposed towards me. Then he would condescend to teach me new variations on *ragas* which no one had as yet committed the sin of writing down on paper.

Panditji was not a conscientious man by any means and unaware that even while I was singing my ears still kept track of

his moments he would get up go to the mantelpiece and set the clock ten minutes ahead so that he might shorten the time of his ordeal. Yet no one could summon enough courage to ever challenge, without proof the integrity of the sage. For Pandita was a very learned man and whatever faults he had they were dictated by necessity.

But one day as chance would have it just as he was tampering with the clock my father walked in. Father was at first embarrassed at having caught Pandita red-handed. Then unable to control his irritation he asked Pandita what it was that makes you so uninterested in this pupil and moves you to set the clock ahead even though you admit he is a promising student? Were you pre-arranging when you commented on my son's talent?

Pandita retorted I was not at that time. But Doctorji why would Almighty Providence have given intellect to mankind if not to use it? What has there would be if all men followed only the straight path of truth? Do you not admit that so?

But Pandita God made snakes and poison as well. Would you by that reasoning drink poison?

Ah Doctorji you forget that I do take poison when I am sick. But however that may be poison is not an innate quality like a lie without which we would not see the truth. Even you Doctorji tell lies to patient verging on death. You tell him he may get well instead of the truth about the black and dismal future awaiting him. White lies or black lies they are lies nevertheless. And besides there would be no truth if there were no lies just as there would not be good without evil. So Doctorji I tell lies just as often as truth to give truth more value.

Exasperated with this devious philosophical discourse my father said only Pandita I hope understand that if the climate may be more conducive to truth than to lies. Then he left the room cursing Pandita who was anything but insulted that he had won his case and that the long years of training under his guru had not been wasted.

But there was one thing Pandita did not teach and I never dared ask him to teach it to me.

Only once a year could he be prevailed upon for his unique rendition of *ghunghrus*, the most treasured art which he had acquired from his *guru*

In India, the dancers tie a tight band of small bells around their ankles, and as they dance, these bells ring out in rhythmical tunes, disclosing the precise movements of their feet. Panditji had learned from his *guru* to imitate the sound of these bells in his throat, and he did this with such precision and authenticity that one might have suspected him of hiding these *ghunghrus* somewhere in his chest. Once a year around Diwali, a great Hindu festival which celebrates the return of Ram from exile by gradually preparing Panditji for three weeks by catering to his every wish in food, sweetmeats or services, he could be persuaded to give a rendition.

One of his conditions was that we would not invite any friends, and when Pushpa, a friend of sister Poo, and a great musician herself, wanted to come and hear him, we had to hide her behind the curtains during the performance.

A day before the Diwali, Panditji would stroll into the drawing room and instead of finding me there alone, he would discover the whole family.

No lesson today, Vedji? he would ask me. I would look somewhat puzzled, and then he would say, Well, it's holiday time - I'll come back after Diwali, and start to leave. Then Mother would ask, Panditji, won't you stay for a glass of *lassi*?

No - no - no, he would say, and my mother, in the typical manner of an Indian hostess, would refuse to take no for an answer, and would persist. While my mother and Panditji were still debating, I would run into the pantry and fetch a glass of *lassi*. Now you have to stay, I would say, and he would finally answer, If you insist.

Even though he took his seat on the floor by the harmonium, still there was no guarantee that the performance would be on. No one dared suggest it, for if once he said no, you could depend on his obstinacy never to relent. It was not like drinking a glass of buttermilk, which by custom Panditji could never accept at

the first offering. His performance had to come from within from an inner inspiration: no external forces would be permitted to interfere with it.

After he had taken his place on the floor, he would run his fingers lightly over the harmonium. First one could hear the soft tones forming, but as he would start pumping the bellows, the harmonium with more care the tones would become complex scales. For half an hour or so he would just play scales. Then with the great ease of a guru he would shade into playing the same all the time trying to create a mood conducive to his meditation. We would all wait apprehensively uncertain whether our week of catrinas would be rewarded.

Sometimes he would stop playing the harmonium and lift his hands completely off the keyboard. That is it, I would think, and a moment of repose would follow broken only when he rubbed his hands together, but then he would resume playing.

Now the early going when he only kimmered the notes would be transformed into melodious scales with the flat notes emphasized and prolonged until the tune took on the dignity worthy of Hindu expectations would happen. Then I would hear a sound like blowing a noseliss whistle, and if I had not known what was to follow I might have thought he was out of breath. The throb of sound would assume a more regular character. Finally he would break into the bell-like notes. Slowly but surely the sound would grow more and more like the low jingling of the al bells. Then the tune on the harmonium and the resonant humming would be coordinated until they blended into a sensuous melody.

In my mind I could imagine Uday Shastri, the great dancer, there him. What a control over his lungs! I thought. Sometimes for two or three minutes he could not breathe in any air, and the *ghu-ghru* hummed from octave to octave without his interrupting the pattern for even the shallowest breath. For once precisely with the stopping take a long breath, he went on playing the same tune twice as if he had a limitless repertoire. His perfect rhythm and excellently tuned cadence

THE DINNER-TABLE SCHOOL

made the melody and the chimes rich and beautiful We sat spellbound and in ecstasy At that moment, but only at that moment I would gladly have become his disciple

When he stopped he was perspiring and gasping for air He did not need any applause and compliments to assure him of his effect He knew the full state of our rapture After sitting immobile for fifteen minutes, until he had recaptured full control of his breath he would quietly depart without any more ado and for us, the celebration of Diwali with its hundreds of candles and *dryas* and appetizing aromas was off to a good start a day before its arrival

Whenever the family and I would despair over the nerve racking idiosyncrasies of this man we would always think of this occasion, and would be filled with admiration for his knowledge, which was not confined merely to a thorough understanding of *ragas* but to a perfect control over his vocal chords If his conceit and his eccentricities, ranging from tampering with the clock to flying into tirades at the slightest excuse became sometimes unbearable we continued to put up with him We well knew that almost all good classical teachers in Pindi were no better than he, and though he taxed our endurance, and sometimes almost crushed the talent which I had for Indian music, nevertheless he was indispensable It was a poor substitute for what I might have attained during those years, but it was at least a partial compensation Had it been my fortune to have him longer than I did I might have extracted more of that concealed knowledge which had ripened during its long contact with generations of sages, and perhaps even learned the art of imitating *ghunghrus* so that this treasure would not have perished with his death I might even have become a musician entrenched in his school and versed in his techniques for even he admitted I was a promising student, but this could be achieved by no less means than by becoming the most devoted of all his disciples abandoning home and academic education to follow his solitary passion Instead my thoughts and aims were pledged elsewhere, in a different direction, and I cannot say I am sorry for it

INSIDE OUR OWN HOUSE

Father had been unusually quiet. Shanti, Father responded pensively, I don't like all that's been going on.

What's been going on? brother Om asked.

While we listened, Father told us that a head-on clash between Hindus and Muslims seemed in the making. I could not help thinking of Ram Saran and Qasim Ali, one Hindu, the other Muslim. Both were my friends.

In the history of India, Father went on, the two most precious principles have been those of non-violence and renunciation. Leaders like Buddha, Asoka and Gandhi, he said, have been the pathfinders in the long journey of our nation. These men have guided the course of history towards harmony and peace, but even as we sit in this dining room, a storm is brewing which seems to be bent upon turning the work of the ages to ashes.

While Gandhi's followers, he said, were locked in the British jail during the war, so that Englishmen would not have to fight the war with their house divided, more militant forces seem to have taken over the country. I fear, he pronounced solemnly, for the safety of our nation and our home.

Much of this, I am sure, sister Umi said impulsively, is British rumour. If they can convince everyone, Daddy, that as soon as they leave, the storm that you speak about will break out and our nation will go to pot, maybe they think we will change our tune and ask them to stay on in India.

Maybe, Father said thoughtfully, but they are wrong. India will be free, but I fear what freedom will bring in its train.

I can hardly wait, sister Nimi said, to see the lights glowing on Independence Day. It will be a real Diwali.

Like the one we had on V J Day? Usha asked.

Much better than that, sister Poo said.

I think I will save the ten *rupees*, I said, that I won from Ram Saran at the victory of the Allies, to buy *diyas* for our house.

Daddy, Usha asked, do you really think that Ram Saran and Qasim Ali are going to fight?

There was a long pause.

INSIDE OUR OWN HOUSE

exceeds the means of the parents, simply because a large dowry may fetch a better suitor

When I married your father, Mother began, I had nothing in common with him. I could not speak English and had too little education even to talk with him intelligently. I had no hand in our marriage, and neither did he. It was all arranged by our parents. I went as his bride without having even a fragmentary picture of this man with whom I was to spend the rest of my life, and whose happiness was to be mine. And finding him so unlike myself, I was very disheartened, and my confidence in my parents' judgement was shaken.

Had there been a way open to me to get out of that marriage I gladly would have, but thank God there wasn't. Had I left him then I would never have had all the happiness I have known since.

So heeding my mother's advice I continued to suffer in silence. The only way, she would say to me, is to win him by sacrifice. And had I not been brought up to love and adore my husband we might have—

Could my father have been heartless, I thought? He was so gentle and understanding.

Yet when you children were born he would rather play with you than go to the club of which he was so fond. Urmil, when you arrived, I was not at all grieved, for he was by my side. Thus the sacrifice bore fruit.

Sister Nimi interrupted Mother. But would you not have been just as happy—even happier—with someone else, someone who was perhaps less educated and Westernized?

Well, that's hard to say, for I'm very happy now and in a sense I was happy even when I suffered most. I had been brought up that way, and now that I look back on it the first years would have been much worse if I hadn't been prepared for them.

I agree with Mother, said sister Pom. It's a different kind of education that makes a good mother.

Sister Umi broke in again. I don't see what happiness is in suffering.

children, sister Umi insisted, and still keep some of the old customs

You can't just discard a few customs in the kind of society we live in sister Pom said. Perhaps we are subject to more suffering, but then we can endure more than we might other wise.

But at what cost, Pom? asked Nimi. The deplorable poverty — we have never gone hungry to know really what physical suffering is. Our mother has never been beaten by her husband, either

I thought about our grandmother Bhabiji and how she had sometimes suffered at the temper of Lalaji yet she talked about Lalaji always in a very tender and respectful manner

But as I say Nimi you can't blame all this on how we marry, said Pom. That is the way of life in this crowded country

I think our whole family system would degenerate Umi said Pom. We are taught from childhood to respect Father and to acknowledge that his word is final in all things. Perhaps there isn't as much freedom but there is more than enough unity in love and affection to compensate for it. We don't have broken homes where the children belong neither here nor there

Sister Umi half laughing went on. Pom you have to admit this is a man's world, and in this country especially I don't see why it should be. I'm just as good as any of them

I hope you realize the consequences in our society if the women started leading independent lives, working like men

But perhaps there wouldn't be so much poverty said Umi. Then Nimi spoke slowly. I see with you Pom. There is good in suffering. But not when it's carried so far

Society will change said Umi as we get our freedom and there is less subservience and useless misery in Indian homes. No theorizing is going to change matters. People will change of their own accord. I'm looking forward to that day

Soon the conversation turned to the anticipated freedom of India and the subject of marriage was dropped. I wished Father had been there to say something about how the free system actually worked in the Western world

engage qualified teachers who are so scarce everywhere. Apart from the principal who was not blind, the teaching staff at Emerson consisted of six members whose education at best had terminated with high school graduation, a feat considered spectacular for the visually handicapped.

My father, upon visiting this institute, was very much struck by the financial needs of the school and was very disheartened by the inefficiency and substandards of education. So he approached the Finance Minister, Sir Manohar Lal, whom he knew personally, and requested him to increase the annual allotment to the school. Sir Manohar Lal knew of the special interest of my father and made a single grant of Rs. 45,000 (about £3,000).

While this allocation enabled the institute to add a new wing and admit students whose petitions had been pending for years, it did not improve the academic situation, and although later on another grant made possible the engaging of Mr. Khanna, an excellent administrator, even his devoted efforts on behalf of better education for the blind were frustrated.

I tried to prevail upon my father to send me to this school, a request which at first he did not consider with much favour, for although the school was located only three miles away from our home, a maze of narrow streets and dirt roads made a prohibitive path from my home in Temple Road to Emerson School inside Sheranwala Gate. If no mills were present to mar the sky with suffocating smoke, as in Dadar, one had only to walk within Sheranwala Gate to find its substitute in the stench of rotten vegetables and human filth. Then too, there was a question of how much I would gain from this trade school, even if the hurdle of distance were overcome. But my father, seeing my unyielding determination to get away from the confines of the four walls at home, decided to give the project a try.

One of our servants, Gian Chand, was asked to cruise all the streets leading to Sheranwala Gate on his bicycle and map out a route which minimized the danger from accidents. If this route were satisfactory, then Gian Chand might carry me on his bicycle to school. He came home to tell my father that

when the student made a mistake, he would curse him violently.

I soon realized that it was political indoctrination, no teaching that Mr Baqir considered his job. Boy, he would say, in his harsh and confident voice which challenged dispute, tell me, what is the Hindu religion? Do they have a prophet like Mohammed? Are they the chosen people? No, then are mock and sterile, ridden with tradition and superstition. We Muslims conquered them with the greatest ease. Wasn't it the strength of our religion that converted so many heretics?

I was too naïve, not initiated yet in the way of Mr Baqir and these peroration of the truth added to my confusion. I was terrified at being in a classroom with this teacher who could better educate us in the use of vile language, profane yet picturesque, than make us efficient in reading Braille. In the confusion of tapping cane creaking fan and the roar of Mr Baqir it was indeed difficult to listen for Mr Phanna's footstep and warn Mr Baqir in time to control his language and confine his remarks to Braille, for in the even that we let Mr Phanna slip up on Mr Baqir, we were assured of the stinging blow of a wet cane across our knuckles which often missed its mark to strike another part more tender.

For two hours, Mr Baqir belloved at his students without ever showing signs of vocal fatigue. I was frightened and horrified at the crudity of this man. I thought of the refined nun, about whom my sister had talked so enthusiastically in Pindi and felt depressed. My desire for education wavered as never before. I felt the four walls drawing in closer and closer, and the low roof crushing my ambition and I felt too dizzy to hold my head up. I longed for four o'clock when I might see Gian Chand.

The next two hours were spent in a better atmosphere, for they were devoted to my music lesson which were held in the new wing of the building. Besides my singing the continuous rhythm of the *tabla* and the hissing noise of the harmonium checked forever any urge Mr Chand, my music teacher might have felt to copy the mannerisms of Mr Baqir. They were two hours of calm, soothing to my tired body and discouraged spirit.

Yes, sir four years

You were at Dadar School weren't you? And how did you like that?

I was happy there, sir But the climate didn't suit me, and so I was sick a good part of the time

You were exposed, then, quite young to what schools for the blind are like, and still you wanted to come back?

Well, sir, my brother and all my sisters went to school, and I admire my father, who is so learned and has travelled so much He wanted me to have as good an education as his other children He even tried to send me to Perkins a few years ago

Why didn't they take you?

They said, sir, I was too young and should know more about my country before I went there

That's true enough What have you been learning these last few years my boy? If you want to go to America you must have much more preparation than this

But, sir there were no schools for me to go to here

You could have been tutored at home

I was in music

But why not arithmetic, or English?

No one knew how to teach blind children

It's not too different from teaching other children I admit, some understanding is necessary Your sisters could have taught you

This was the first time that such a question had been put to me and ever since then, it has been a recurring thought Even if each one of them had helped me an hour a day I would have learned just as much as though I were going to school

I don't know, sir Perhaps they have always been too busy

Too busy to teach you? That's not my impression of your family

I can't think of any other reason

Maybe they treated you too normally, and never considered your special problems

My father always said that I would one day go to America and learn there

But they took this too much for granted. Remember that you must know very much about your own country if you ever plan to come back here. What would you do supposing you did go to America? Would you be interested in coming back to India and helping the blind people?

I don't think so. If I could see I would be a doctor just like my father.

But you can't see. What else but tea-hungry would there be for you to do?

I could teach in a university. Maybe take up law.

Well I don't mind telling you you are too ambitious and so is your father. I know you both and can make allowances but I don't think that authorities in America will. Maybe I can help you. Say you come in here an hour a day - you spend two hours with Baqi - don't you? Well you can spend one of them with me. I could help you come with history and we could talk this over. Would you like that better?

Yes sir. Then summoning my presence of mind I dislike it very much sir.

Well you just do that. For the first time he fumbled for words. Well well sir. You can go now.

Thus gradually time passed again. Mr Khanna asked probing questions. He made me realise that my desire to go to America had overhadowed all other considerations. I knew what I didn't want to be - a beggar, hopkicker, or a hawker - but I did not know what my future should be. Whenever I put this question to my father he added nothing and gave only vague answers.

Education, he would say, is a lifelong asset and once you have it you can always find something to do with it.

It was soon to learn how inadequate an answer that was. No educational authorities anywhere could reconcile themselves to this. Education they maintained was a liability if it made you a misfit for your own society. While Mr Khanna had refrained from disillusioning me completely about my ambition, he had frequently hinted at its vagueness. Once he told me, 'I admire you and your father for your ambition but those who don't know you will consider it foolhardy. You will receive much

discouragement, and you will have to learn to insulate yourself against it. You are too sensitive and that's bad. Especially so since you are blind. Whatever you may do, you'll never convince the world that you are normal. And if you go abroad, you will be even more isolated, for you'll miss your home and country.

These were the thoughts which added to the turmoil of my mind, and whereas in Rawalpindi I had considered education to be a panacea, now I was not sure. Mr Khanna was forcing me to be introspective, and at the same time making me aware of some of the problems which would come with education. Yet my ambition had taken too great hold of me. It had been a sustaining force throughout my four years of idleness, and no disillusionment could entirely checkmate it.

I spent one hour a day with Mr Khanna which proved to be most valuable. We talked about history and he would give me some lessons in English vocabulary. Even Mr Baqir's classes grew more tolerable than my first day's impression.

Though the time might have been spent more advantageously in a better school, I did not regret my attendance at Emerson. I found the students very friendly and the feeling of being independent of having my own friends in students and Mr Khanna was exhilarating and dispelled all my first day's misgivings.

I was very happy during the seven months at Emerson, for starting at seven twenty in the morning until five o'clock in the evening when I reached home I was busy. Then in the evening, I would go to Rastriya Swayam Sewak Sangh, the R S S S, a Hindu organization determined to bring about political freedom for India. Sohan Lal, a student at Sir Gunga Ram Medical Hospital, would come by for me each evening at seven o'clock and together we would walk to the meeting grounds about a mile from my home.

We would stay there until nine o'clock, playing games, doing calisthenics, but more than that, praying and singing hymns. Almost all the people present were college students, and certainly I, at twelve, was the youngest person. Since the day, independence was fast approaching, the topic of

with everyone particularly students was politics and long after the last hymn had been sung we would sit around on the ground talking of the current political situation. There were hopeful people there were frightened people. Some said that when the day of independence came India would start on a path of greatness equal to the Western world. Then there were others who saw nothing but gloom. They pointed to the increasing nationalist sentiments among the Muslims as a sure sign of destruction of the very independence for which we had struggled so long. They felt that the Indians divided among themselves would soon prove their inability to govern and if not the British then some other great power would come to take over.

As the time passed and we approached the months of December and January 1946 and 1947 the tone of their talk changed. They pictured themselves as brave men who would recue India from the bloody path toward which some fanatics were steering her.

Generally they would say we'll stop bloodshed. As the pressure mounted for the partitioning of India all differences were resolved into a common purpose to try to keep India united. There was no fear no threat nor much less any preparation for effecting these plans. But there was a sense of responsibility and of courage. Thus if I were not learning much British arithmetic I was being exposed to a variety of views from Mr. Baq's fanaticism to Mr. Khanna's historical approach to the keen sense of the students who analysed the currents of the time. There was a awareness of movement of living monumental hours only darkened by the inward fear of the unknown.

Marriage in the Making

IN the month of February, when we had been in Lahore almost four months, we heard through one of my father's friends about an eligible young dentist in Dehra Dun named Kakaji Mehrotra. As always in such cases, a thorough investigation followed, in which the young man and his family background were scrutinized. Even his friends were reviewed. Did they drink? With the precision of a lawyer, the liabilities and assets were carefully evaluated.

Even though her whole future happiness was at stake, sister Pom, who as the eldest daughter, by tradition must be the first to marry, was given no hint of what was going on. For this there were several reasons: first because when a girl reaches the age of marriage, many inquiries are made, and almost all the network of relations keeps on the look out. Since the families are so large, and remain in such close contact, there may be hundreds of people who, without being told, bear the eligible members of other families in mind. So there are many leads, all of which have to be carefully tracked down, and it is thought best not to worry the children with these steps. Then too, since the parents ultimately make the decision, they deem it unnecessary to consult the child prior to the settlement of final arrangements.

As Kakaji was a more attractive prospect than any other leads, his parents were finally approached — for the initiative always rests with the girl's parents. Then his family follows the same intricate process of thorough investigation, often with the help of relatives on the spot. If they are favourably impressed, then the parents, sometimes with their son, come to view the girl in question. But since Dehra Dun was so far from Lahore, Kakaji came by himself.

In the early part of March he arrived in Lahore and casually dropped in for tea. I say casually because his manner was that but with the network of elaborate planning behind the event it was actually anything but casual. Sister Pom — she was now nineteen — was sent for and came with Mother into the drawing room. Dressed in a soft silver bordered dress she shyly served Kakaji tea while he continued to talk to other members of the family. During the tea he addressed some remarks to sister Pom about her studies in college and the painting over the mantelpiece and told her about his summer practice at a hill station.

(After this short interview on which so much depends if Kakaji is attracted to sister Pom and favourably impresses our family the talk proceeds but without sister Pom's presence Kakaji judiciously keeps himself from committing himself until he has spoken to his parents. If he doesn't like her the matter is dropped.)

Actually four days later a note arrived from his mother asking if sister Pom could be betrothed to Kakaji. My father with his Western attitudes refrained from answering the letter until sister Pom was consulted. So in the drawing room one night Mother approached sister Pom as to what she thought of Kakaji. Before Pom said anything sister Umi, amused by all the arrangements remarked, "How do you expect her to know what he minds when all they talk about was the furniture? Could she have fallen in love already—"

Lo-e-Umi! my father answered means something very different from falling in love. It is a process rather than an act and only time can happen. The best we can do is give it every opportunity to succeed and I'll admit this is hard.

But doesn't every opportunity include knowing the person better? sister Umi asked.

Yes it should. Father replied but here the question is of knowing. To know a person thoroughly might take years. Now we believe that knowing can only come through living together.

Do you mean then said Umi that knowing and love are the same thing?

Not quite, but understanding and respect are essential to mature love and this deep understanding cannot come from friendship alone. Even serious conversations can't fully reveal a person's character. That can only come through experience, through sharing each other's problems. No amount of talking will bring about full understanding. It is only when you consider each other's problems as one and the same that you can hope for true understanding.

But, Father, said Nimi, who was the political rebel in the family, look at the risk that's involved.

We minimize the risk as far as possible, he explained. We try to find a home which is most like ours. Take Kakaji. He's a dentist. His life will not be too different from mine. Now if I were to marry Promila in the Brahman caste, I would be increasing the gamble. They might not eat meat, they would pray two or three times a day and their professions would be on totally different lines. These things are small, perhaps, but they have far reaching effects.

Nimi spoke again. Then you are perpetuating a caste, because this presupposes that Pom would have to be married in the Kshatriya caste of professional people. For myself I'd willingly marry a Bania shopkeeper or even a Sundra untouchable, and help break down these barriers.

That day might come. But you will admit, Nirmal, that you are increasing the gamble.

But for a cause I believe in, said Nimi.

Yes, he answered, but that's another matter.

You say Umi broke in that understanding and respect are necessary for a happy marriage. I don't see why you would respect a person more because you lived with him and shared his problems.

In our society, said Father, we think of respect as coming only through sacrifice.

Then said Umi, you're advocating the subservience of women. Because it's not Kakaji who will sacrifice, but sister Pom. And why should that be? And how is it that sister Pom will respect Kakaji because she sacrificed for him?

No Umi! it is the other way around! It is he who will respect her for her sacrifice.

Does that mean that sister Pom will respect Kakaji though?

No necessarily. But if Kakaji is moved by Promila's sacrifices he will have more consideration and growing concern for her. I know in my own case I was moved to the depths to see you mother Shanti suffer. It took me long enough to long I believe to reach that understanding perhaps because I had broken away from the old traditions and had given in to the Western influence. You can hope then for this respect to be reciprocal between Promila and Kakaji and don't forget that all this time they are getting to understand each other better.

Umi persisted. This may take years and is sister Pom to be unhappy all this time?

Perhaps so. But she is striving for ultimate happiness and love. These are precious gifts which can only be cultivated in time.

Hard only for Promila sister Umi insisted. Aren't you struck by the injustice of this? Shouldn't Kakaji sacrifice for their happiness too?

There has to be a start. Remember it's his life that's joined with hers. She will forsake her past to build a new future and you may call this a complete beginning of absolutely new experience. If both Promila and Kakaji were to be obstinate and wait to see who will take the first step what hope do you have of their ever getting together?

That evading my question Father! Why shouldn't he take the initiative?

He would perhaps be expected to if Promila were weak too and leading an idle life which would be quite his suppose more than this I really can't say and there may be some justice at that.

What is this happiness you speak of? said sister Umi only vaguely understanding it.

It is a uniting of ideal and purposes and making them blend into one. Love grows gradually. This is the tradition of our

society, and these are the means we have adopted to make our marriage successful and beautiful. We must have faith in the goodness of the individuals, and rely on the strength of this sacred bond. In the West they have solved the problem in a different way, because their conditions vary from ours. I cannot say if it has worked any better.

But I love my independence, said sister Umi, for that is my ideal.

Remember always, said Father, that the ideals must be resolved by placing values on every one of them for you must choose among them.

Then to sister Pom he said: I have done my best and my responsibility for you is not over. I will always be there to help, and continue to find satisfaction in your happiness. I have lived and worked for these values.

And I respect your values and your judgement, replied sister Pom. I have faith in your choice. Even if I do suffer I can hope that some day our marriage will be as happy as yours.

Then with Umi and Nimi chattering and Father and I following along behind, we went to bed leaving Mother and sister Pom together in the drawing room.

The engagement ceremony is a simple one and was performed a few days after our conversation in the drawing room by a learned *pandit* who recited the *Gayatri Mantra* from the *Rig Veda* and invoked the blessings of the gods for the future happiness of the couple. A ring was placed on Pom's finger by Kakaji's sister, who brought a brocade *sari* and a veil and sweets along with the ring. The platter of fresh baked sweetmeats was a big one and a servant began passing it to the friends and relatives who had been invited for the ceremony.

While sister Pom sat in the corner with her face completely covered by the veil, her intimate friends and our near relatives sang the songs which have been sung on similar occasions for generations — to the simple beat of the *dholki*, a small drum. No man is permitted to be present at this ceremony, but curious brothers are sometimes able to hide near the door and listen the ladies sing. Now and then they stopped to make jokes.

expense of the bride-to-be who is supposed to smile and cry beneath her veil for the words and moods of the songs vary from utter sadness at the girl's leaving her family to jubilant singing over the new life awaiting the bride.

As I listened I wondered what must be going on in Sister Pom's mind and I was glad that she had the privacy of the veil.

As brother Om, Cousin Yog and I crouched by the closed door we could hardly make out the remarks for the ladies all chattered at the same time. Shortly before midnight a supper was served and then the older ladies departed giving Sister Pom solemn advice about preparation for marriage. Soon her teasing girl friends left also promising to be back for the wedding which was still two months away.

If the wedding was going to be on time all the preparations had to be squeezed into the interim. Actually they would have been well under way even without the prospect of a groom had it not been for the time spent on the finishing touches for our house.

The first step was to begin collecting the dowry. Originally in Vedic times the bride was adorned simply and affectionately and the dowry consisted of more than a few presents from the family at the wedding. I soon learned how different it was now. Sister Pom's dowry must include the jewellery bedding a sewing machine cooking utensils and cutlery—in fact everything for a home save a car and the house itself which might have been included had it not been for the three younger sisters. Her dowry had to match Sister Pom's. The splendour of this dowry might well determine the subsequent offers to my other three. I told my grandmother carefully and assessed many of our relatives as to the presents they would give to the bride so that there might be no duplication.

Although a few of the relatives thought the number of twenty-two was rather few more considerations had to be spent by Mother and sister Pom going to crowded bazaars and choosing the shawl which had to differ in material colour and border. No two could be alike and even though the expensive ones of Benares brocade cost hundreds of rupees the

wardrobe was supposed to be so rich in variety that the bride could have a *sari* for each and every occasion for many years to come. Actually, *sis* are very practical garments. Always six yards in length, they fit every size of woman be she short or tall slender or stout, merely with a few subtle adjustments of the folds.

Jewellery, matching the *sis*, had to be made to order. Because until recently the laws of inheritance in India favoured the male members of the family at the expense of the widow, a woman's most valued possessions were her gold and diamonds. These jewels alone formed her *isti dhan* her inheritance which could not be taken away from her after her husband's death according to Manu the great Hindu lawgiver. My mother had recited to me the law of Manu sometime before. The ornaments which may have been worn by women during their husband's lifetime his heirs shall not divide. Those who divide them shall be outcasts.

However many packages Mother and sister Pom brought home from their frequent trips to the bazaar the bundles did not tell the whole story. There was the constant hum from the veranda of the two sewing machines operated by friendly tailors who had been engaged to help with the preparations. They sewed pillowcases embroidered borders for a few *sis* which had been purchased plain and made blouses jumpers and gowns. Since in India hardly anything can be bought ready made the tailors also helped hem tablecloths and bedspreads which my sisters and their friends were kept busy embroidering. There were also the regular visits of the jewellers who brought with them bags full of necklaces, rings and bracelets in order that my other sisters and Father could be consulted before a final selection was made. The house was full of new odours — of threads and linen, of flowers and cosmetics. It was chaos. I found it difficult to move about without stumbling over one bundle after another and the beds and chairs were piled up with dozens of half unwrapped packages.

While the ladies made these preparations for the dowry the men were busy arranging for the *barat* the bridegroom's

which consists of his many relatives and friends. Although the bridegroom's family is burdened with the expenses of their transportation it falls upon the family of the bride to be the hosts during the three day marriage ceremony. It was fortunate for us that the distance of three hundred miles between Dehra Dun and Lahore would prevent Kakaji from bringing a party of two hundred which although the highest number permitted in any marriage was quite appropriate to his social status. Besides because of the famine in Bengal at that time (which took a toll of two million lives) the government did not allow a *bat* of more than fifty to be entertained.

Here and there the were surreptitious suggestions although never from the *bat* that my father could easily circumvent this ruling but he stubbornly refused. It was well for our pocket book that my father would not break the ruling of the very government which he served because had the number of the *bat* exceeded fifty we would probably have been forced to hire at great expense a *jangha* a community building for their housing. As it was by doubling up some of the families in the Mehta Gille the vacated houses could be used for the *barat*. Bu-lap sacks of ground wheat for *pu* the little pancakes fruit and spices chicken legs of mutton mounds of rice were lugged in - enough to feed a regiment. Arrangements were made for pooling servants of the Mehta and Mehra (my mother's) families, and shoeshin boys and barbers were engaged from May 10 through May 13.

Along with the housing of the *bat* there were also two hundred of our relations expected from all over India who had to be looked after. Each of the Mehta and Mehra families in Lahore promised to make available a few beds for those who came from long distances and floor space for those who were coming from the neighbourhood. Thus for the two months between the engagement and the actual wedding ceremony the house was taken up with frantic preparation. Everyone took an interest in each step and what I did I not feel or hear or stumble over was carefully explained to me. Indeed was the whole wedding ceremony with all its pomp colour and splendour

On the morning of the tenth, brother Om and I stood across the street from the Mehta *Gullie*. I heard car after car, some borrowed, some hired, pull away for the station. Neither Father nor brother Om nor I could go to the station because we had to wait for the formal meeting the *milni*. It was a long while before the cars started streaming back into the Mehta *Gullie* filled, as brother Om told me, with bright but tired looking people. The shoeshine boys were in a more fortunate position than we, for at least they could be close to Kakaji right then, and we would have to wait until the evening. The servants and my cousins were at great premium at home because they brought snatches of news about the *barat*. Now three of the *barat* were having haircuts. Kakaji had just breakfasted and two barbers were quarrelling as to who would shave him. Now all the *barat* was out in the cars for sight seeing. They had lunched already. Our cooks were gratified because they had eaten heartily. Tea was over, one servant reported and Kakaji had eaten three pastries. Now all were getting dressed for the *ghori*, the marriage procession.

No sooner did we hear about the *ghori* than all the necklaces of lights which were strung around our house were lighted up. From the Mehta *Gullie*, less than a block away from our home I heard the band strike up the blending of trumpets and clarinets, drums and cymbals, into one of the popular cinema tunes and I knew the *ghori* was on its way. I slipped rapidly into my long coat like *achkan*, and had my father tie my turban up and ran out on the street with brother Om. The turban and *achkan* felt awkward and the *achkan* rustled like a *sari*.

I have never worn an *achkan* before. I said.

I never would, brother Om said, if it were not for Mother's insistence upon observing the tradition.

From the gate of our house I listened to the gay music of the band and in my mind I pictured Kakaji mounted on a *ghori*, a well bred and trained mare. From Kakaji's waist there was undoubtedly a sword, symbolizing his readiness to defend the woman against his enemies and to ensure the inviolability of the home to which he would bring his bride. I thought about the

horse with all its ornamental trappings and wondered amidst the loud music, whether Kakaji or the ghori was the more nervous. Probably Kakaji since the ghori had gone through similar experience. The band music got slightly muffled.

They have probably taken a detour, brother Om said to show off the groom.

And advise me to Pom's marriage, I said.

Thus far it was Kakaji's evening. He rode on the horse because he was a knight coming to get his bride. As of old it was a chivalrous and heroic thing and like all knights he possessed moral and physical courage.

As soon as the ghori turned into our street, brother Om described to me Kakaji's pink silk turban and its gilded cross, loaded with garlands of flowers.

Here he is, I shouted and my father, his friends and relations and the *pardis* gathered by the gate for the *milni*. By now all the guests had alighted from their cars and they stood facing each one of them having been galloped. Some of my sister's friends were inside engaged in the ceremony of dressing her in the traditional red broadened wedding which I had seen earlier while other friends were evaluating the worth of the dowry which was set out on exhibition in the drawing room.

They began to proceed with Kakaji on his horse at the head approach of the *darwaza* but slowly, very slowly as though giving us time for every last arrangement. The band kept up its fury playing medley after medley blanketing all other sound. Kakaji's horse halted right in the passageway formed between the row of guests on the one side and all of us on the other. The band immediately stopped playing and a chapel-like quiet reigned as the *pardis* stepped forward. He recited Vedic hymns inoking blessings from the Almighty. The *pardis* then called my father for the *milni*, the ceremony of introduction between the fathers of the bride and the bridegroom. As Kakaji's father had died a year ago the *amban* was exchanged between his uncle, Dr. Prakash and my father. After my father's introduction, important relations of the bridegroom were called to meet the respective relations of the bride. We made presents, for the most

part in cash, to our opposite number in the *barat* Kakaji had no younger brother or a substitute for my *milni*, so I thrust my present back into my pocket

Kakaji, who had remained on horseback during the ceremony now moved forward to the steps leading to our house where my sisters and their girl friends were waiting with buckets full of flower petals. The servants were running around, spraying people with scented water and helping my sisters hurl the petals. Kakaji was surrounded by the teasing girls and brother Om and I helped him to alight. Presumably sister Pom had a choice, until that moment, to refuse Kakaji, because it was she who had to garland him as a sign of her acceptance. The *jasmala* she did shyly without a word.

As the band struck up again, brother Om and I led Kakaji to an empty room. Here we had a chance to chat with him for a little while. This time he was in a freer mood than we had seen him at our tea table and he even jested about the elaborate arrangements we had made. Soon after sisters Nimi and Umi came in, and they started arranging for Kakaji's dinner. I went out and listened to the colourful sounds which filled the air and brought excitement to a fever pitch. Servants were running to and fro serving the twenty piece band. My uncles were leading the whole procession of the *barat* upstairs where they were to have their dinner.

On our back porch a row of *halwans* sat preparing large cauldrons of food in makeshift fireplaces. There was the ceaseless noise of their stirring something in the cauldrons and the noise of clapping as they shaped *puris*. They must be making a *puri* a second, I thought and I remembered the famine in Bengal. I walked up and down the rows of *halwans* guests and orchestra members feeling in my unfamiliar *achkan* as though I were another wedding ornament — with legs on. Friends of my father greeted me warmly. Servants asked me to go inside and rest, and the drum player showed me his tight coat belt, with an ornamental buckle. All our two hundred guests were there *en masse*, milling about waiting to be fed. For them there was a long wait ahead, however, because the *barat*, as our

guests would be served first and only then our relatives And I would have to wait until the very end

I have been looking for you brother Om shouted above the din of voices We have to go upstairs and meet the *bride*

The feasting was over by midnight the band had been dismissed and some of our relatives had gone to bed with full stomachs Other relatives close friends and the *bride* gathered around the *bride* and took their places on the floor for the actual wedding ceremony Earlier I had helped with the decoration of the *ved* the wedding arch which had been built in the centre of the courtyard Four posts of banana trunks had been firmly set in the ground to form an eight foot square Twigs with green leaves formed the arcades around which were hung fruit and flowers balloons and strings of coloured lights A brass cauldron was placed in the centre for the sacramental fire which in Vedic times is considered the purifier

The *pandit* who was to perform the ceremony cleared his throat repeatedly and silence grew to suspense Sister Nimi whispered to me that Kakaji and sister Poma were sitting on low stool with visions of me to my mother and father looking very grave Now the *pandit* walked into the arcade and started the *h* the lighting of the sacred *agni* The fire crackled as the *pandit* fed it with butter chips of scented wood and incense A huge platter of perfumed salts was passed around the circle and I took a handful

A *pan* h will do sister Nimi whispered

I tried to aim my faithful at the flame and prayed that I would miss the *pandit's* head The fire sizzled and the whole courtyard was filled with the strong aromatic scent The *pandit* began chanting the Vedic hymns in Sanskrit in his soft melancholy voice He paused now and then for Kakaji and sister Poma to repeat the Sanskrit words after him Compared to the *pandit's* delivery theirs seemed hesitant and uncertain but the voices of both of them pitched together for the first time, sounded good

After the vows had been taken he translated them for the benefit of the bride and groom Both of them had promised to

live according to the Hindu creed, to be true to each other, share each other's burdens propagate the race, beget sons, remain firm and faithful like a rock

They are putting their feet on a piece of stone side by side, sister Nimi explained, and now they have started circling the *vedi*

I knew they would have to circle seven times, symbolizing the invocation of the seven planets. Having gone around the ceremonial fire, the bridegroom addressed my sister in a hymn

Become thou my partner as thou hast paced all the seven steps with me. Apart from thee I cannot live. Apart from me do thou not live. We shall share alike all goods and power combined. Over my house you shall bear full sway.

The first day of the three day ceremony was ended when Kakaji took sister Pom over to the Mehta *Gullie* for a few minutes so that she might be introduced to the members of the *barat* who had not attended the wedding. This was an exercise of his will which symbolized that the bride was his and that she was no longer a part of her own family. But the formal departure of my sister was to come after another two days of feasting the *barat*. For each meal the party came with a band, but a small one consisting of only five people.

The pageant came to an end on the third evening with the *doli*, when in a car bedecked simply with flowers the bride and groom drove away from our house with the whole caravan of the *barat* on their heels. None of our relatives were in the caravan, only Father, Mother, Nimi, Umi, Om, Usha, Ashok and myself drove in the last car. This was the first time in those three days that all of us had been together, and then, too, alone. The whole caravan moved at a camel's pace, and I remember feeling hot and uncomfortable as though the *havan* itself was burning inside that car. I felt sorry for Kakaji and sister Pom who would have almost no time alone together before facing the ordeal of still another reception upon their arrival in Dehra Dun, this time given by the *barat*.

Even though we had left our relatives behind I could still hear their voices as they saw sister Pom off, voices which seemed

2

PAKISTAN & TRANSITION

'Divide et'

In February 1947 my father prohibited me from attending R S S S meetings, which had now become militant. Children of civil servants, he reminded us like their parents, could not join political organizations.

Whereas before our house had been filled with happy excitement over wedding plans now it had the tenseness of uncertainty. On the streets could be heard slogans of processions.

Leyke rahengy Pakistan jaise hya tha Hindustan — We will take Pakistan just as we once took Hindustan — and Unionist Ministry *murdabad* — Death to the Unionist Ministry.

At first we climbed to our terrace and silently listened to the shouts of hate. We would all stand side by side, with our hands resting on the railing, leaning forward to catch every word. They sounded too threatening, too unreal for belief. Whereas before, my sisters had always explained what they saw, now they remained quiet. As these processions grew in frequency and were no longer a curiosity, we stopped going to the terrace. Whereas before we had discussed politics and the fast approaching day of independence with great enthusiasm now we avoided it. We felt uncomfortable in one another's company and the conversation ceased to come spontaneously. Often we spoke too loudly, our voices jarring each other's nerves, in the hope of drowning out the cries for blood outside.

Jhanda, whose husky voice each day called *Phal bibi?* — Fruit, madam? — was heard no more. For twenty years he had carried fruit to the Mehta family and had often distributed free mangoes or pears to the children on the street. All that now was in the past, for he was a Muslim, and might be denied burial rights if he sold food to Hindus.

DIVIDE ET

The British posed as the only guardians of Muslim rights, and some Muslims did not waste any time in playing up to them. Sir Sayed Ahmad, an outstanding educationist, advised the Muslims that their hope rested with the British, and they must remain loyal to the government.

Aligarh College, which the British helped to found, became a sort of headquarters for promoting this divide and rule policy. The college was for Muslims only and in 1906 Mr Archbold, the British principal of Aligarh College, played a decisive role in encouraging a few dependable Muslims to ask for a separate electorate. According to plan, the British hailed this demand of the deputation as representative of the Muslim sentiment throughout the country, and separate electorates for Hindus and Muslims were granted. This was the first time that an outright distinction was drawn between the two communities.

This policy was well timed for it prevented all Muslims from throwing their lot in with the Congress Party. Aligarh was to train leaders who preached a doctrine of the separate identity of Muslim and Hindu. Englishmen could not have asked for better agents for executing their designs, since these leaders were Muslims themselves, educated and trained orators whose words had more impact on the masses than if an outsider had tried to persuade them of their right to an Islamic state.

Thus, gradually but skilfully, the emotions of the masses were manipulated until the wave of nationalistic feeling culminated in the formation of the Muslim League. Historians concur that if religion had not been used to drive a wedge between the two communities, no amount of effort by the British or the Muslim leaders in Aligarh, striving for personal power, could have torn them asunder.

Even so, many distinguished Muslims did not desert the Congress Party but remained true to its goal of independence without partition. Yet these leaders, who at the most crucial moment might have checked the growing number of adherents to the Muslim League, were placed in jail with other Congress leaders during the Second World War, while the Muslim League was at liberty to carry on its activity with unabated zeal. At the end

Hindus retaliated by rousing their own people they were sure to be ruthlessly fired upon. We knew, for instance, that whenever there was a procession of Muslims and the police were called out to disperse it, they never used tear bombs, *lathée* charge, or gas as had been used by their predecessors. They would simply arrest the Muslim leaders heading the procession and carry them a few miles distant to where Muslim League cars were waiting to bring them back to regroup and remobilize their forces. We knew all this, and more. But whereas my father took this as a sign of the darkest evil to follow, Chachaji took it more lightly than the situation demanded.

Let's walk over to Chachaji's, my father said, and all of us went to Chachaji's house. As usual, he was seated on the veranda surrounded with papers and books carefully reading them and meticulously taking notes. I could imagine his frown on our arrival even though I could not see it. He was happy enough to see us but he knew that on our arrival the whole issue would be opened again, and confident as he was of the esteem in which he was held by the younger members of the family he did not cherish an argument.

So do we have to go over it all again, Amolak Ram? he asked my father.

Chachaji, you've got to listen to us. In your house there are ten women and one of them is pregnant. There is no sense in taking chances. Now I beg of you either send these women to our house and let us try to improvise some kind of shelter or hiding place there or let me bring my daughters here. I still feel that my house is safer.

Don't you understand, Chachaji interrupted him that I feel just as responsible, if not more so as you do about the women in the family?

I don't deny that. My father tried to justify himself.

Then leave it to me and let me handle it my way.

The upshot of the two-hour session was that we returned home no nearer to convincing Chachaji than we had been when we left. As we walked home my father remarked, If he won't listen to me, Shanti, I must act on my own responsibility. I have

talked this over with Bishan Das (our next door neighbour with whom we shared a common wall) and he tells me that all the Hindu families in this neighbourhood can gather in his home without going into the streets while we men can guard the terrace with guns. That's the only solution.

Whatever you say, so.

My father closed with the remark: This may mean abandoning our home but the times have changed and it is not going to be property that's at stake but life.

Next morning even before I was up I heard a soft knock on the door.

Who's it? I asked.

Sohan entered my friend from the R.S.S.S. who was eighteen years older than I.

My room was on the far side of the house and Sohan had been able to reach it unobserved. My father had strictly forbidden me to entertain guests from the R.S.S.S. for rumour had it that houses of members of the Congress were on the lists of the Muslim League leaders who incited the mobs.

I opened the door. It's so good to see you, Sohan! Tell me what has happened. I heard that the Congress was banned three days ago. What's happening?

Wait a minute, boy - keep a cool head. He said: This is not like yourself. Yes, the situation is very serious. It seems very likely that the Congress will be put into action. I am convinced that the time has arrived when the Muslim League plan to be put into action. They say even Mayo, Mani, and Din have a supply of fire-arms in his home and are distributing them free to Muslims and sending cash day for day.

I heard of that. I told him. My sisters were speaking about it only yesterday.

Yes, he's not making any secret of it.

What are we going to do, Sohan?

It's what can we do? In the meetings when I brought up the subject and talked about the leadership of Congress, they took me seriously enough but they didn't do anything. I tell you, leaders like Gandhi are outmoded. They have done their work.

for India They are too idealistic to cope with these hooligans
You know what you re saying Sohan?

I know – it s heresy I mean it, though

I could not dispute his earnestness This feeling had been at the back of our minds for many months yet no one had put it as bluntly as Sohan He was always calm and collected and his words were well chosen They were keen and sharp and yet delivered with the greatest confidence How many times I had heard him at the *sangh* talking with such fervour that even the most devoted members of the Congress Party could not resist his arguments

I believe you, I said You are almost always right, Sohan

Well I don t know about that, but I think I m right this time Look here we must begin to plan I love your sisters and family as though they were my own (His family was out of the so-called danger zone) You can t wait any longer

That s what Father told us yesterday he has a plan and, Sohan I think it s still secret

I respect your father Have no fear on that score By the way, what does Chachaji say?

He s still immovable as ever

I thought so You know, I wish I were old enough to go and talk to that man

I m not sure even you could convince him of anything I saw him last night in action He certainly seems to have good arguments

‘What are they?’

You know, he talked about history and how amicably Hindus and Muslims have lived together

Yes he s just as archaic as the rest of the Congress people. Why don t they understand the changing times? They speak of history but what about the British history, I ask you? These times haven t changed overnight you know They are the steady work of a century Or does he just skip that hundred years?

Don t be harsh on him, Sohan He thinks differently He can t see how some foreign power can disrupt the good relations of centuries He sees all this in a larger perspective

And then he left as it was nearing the time for my parents to get up. What a wonderful and determined fellow, I thought. Gohan's courage was contagious, and I waited eagerly for his next visit.

my own, and I d hate to see anything happen to them This is a dangerous situation I

I m very grateful to you, Shekh Sahib for your kindness

Well, I told my wife perhaps you d feel the way you do but she still wanted me to come and tell you, and I m glad for that I can t say I blame you

I m glad you are understanding

For thirty seven years Doctorji, we ve known one another I ve seen your children grow up with mine My daughters love yours like their own sisters But however that may be -

I m sure my daughters feel the same way

I wish all this didn t have to happen, but then wishing won t do any good I m sorry, yes, I m sorry

I was almost moved by the sincerity of this man Even Sohan I thought, couldn t scoff at this but then again maybe he could Hadn t he told me how clever these Muslims were and how all of them were being asked to form Pakistan in the name of Mohammed?

Very kind of you, Shekh Sahib my father said and I would always trust you, but -

I know what you mean Doctorji You don t have to explain it any further Let s leave it at that

My father, whose presence of mind was admirable fumbled for words I wondered if he too was experiencing the same conflict to believe or not to believe After an uneasy pause Shekh Sahib began again

Well if you won t let me do any more Doctorji one thing I hope you ll permit me to do It will give me great satisfaction As you know I have my own well and I d like to have you draw your water from there

What an absurd idea this was I thought Surely they couldn t contaminate the reservoir for that would poison Hindus and Muslims alike

Why will I need water? my father asked

It may be that your house will be set on fire, and if you had water, plenty of it, you might be able to save part of it You know the fire brigade won t come to your call

I suppose not. At least not to save a Hindu's house.

Well then, Sheikh Sahib continued. I expect that we could run a pipeline from my tank under the street and connect it with your water. I could talk about how low your water pressure is. It would not be sufficient in case of an emergency. You see, if you know we can't stretch a hose from my house to help you. For then I'd be a traitor and my face wouldn't be any better than yours.

I was enormous, furious and baffled. That would mean asking bribes to let the colour could not be contaminated. Sheikh Sahib slipped poison in his tank. That was just as bad as going to the house.

That's the game of you, Sheikh Sahib. I'd like to talk it over with my father.

Well, I leave you, Doctor.

Then I heard my father's heavy foot on the door. This was such a different time. Mohan and I were so completely lost in thought. I had been a good boy, but I forgot to keep my place behind the curtain and soon my father found me.

You heard all.

Yes, Dad.

And what did you think of it?

There was always a heavy respect for everybody's opinion. We both stood with our heads bowed.

I don't think I should like to go there. I told him I'd rather be buried. I'd prefer to wait and accept his water. If he had that but down to us, but we shouldn't risk our lives by drinking the water.

I think this is the way, son. But I wish you could have seen his face. He was a great man.

I could tell if this was one, but even so—

Even so, he said. That's the question isn't it?

We sat there for a long while without saying anything to one another. At last my father said, I must go and talk it over with you mother. I don't care a muh about the property as I care about her. Sheikh Sahib is feeling. You have only known him as our good neighbour, but to me he is a guru. I started my

college education with him. For thirty seven years I have known him and he is like a father to me. You can understand the veneration I feel for him. Even today he is one of those Muslims who believe in one India. Indeed, he is publishing letters pleading for calmness and for one nation.

He left me sitting there by myself just as Sohan had in the morning. How paradoxical it was to trust yet not to trust. I was glad that the decision rested with my father, not with me. But I was mistaken about that. He called us all into the bedroom and repeating the scene to my sisters, asked us what we thought should be done.

My youngest sister, Usha, didn't have much to say, brother Om was definitely opposed to trusting Sheikh Sahib. He would rather risk antagonizing him than forsake the safety of our home for the whim of one man. Sister Umi commented on the nerve of the man and was amused that he was earnest or seemed sincere. Nimi, however, took a different position.

Daddy, we'll have to trust someone. If we don't have faith or trust, what is to become of us? The mature people will have to keep their heads and not succumb to the temper of the times. This is our test. I'm not afraid of dying and I'd as soon die from poisoned water as commit suicide.

She was right, I thought, and very convincing. This was our test and we must meet it squarely. Then my father interjected. Your mother feels the same way as sister Nimi. I will keep myself neutral and put the question once again to all of you now that everyone has commented. I don't want to influence you and I'll take responsibility for the final action. But I want to know exactly how you feel. Yes or no? he asked me first.

I think sister Nimi is right.

Brother Om was lost for words. I still think that we oughtn't to do it. But sister Nimi has a very strong point. I'm not sure.

Sister Umi was more thoughtful now and we had to wait some time for an answer. Finally she spoke, and in one breath I'm willing to go ahead with Sheikh Sahib's idea.

Then my father addressed Om. Do you still feel very strong about your contention?

When I went to bed that night, so much had come to pass that the thoughts of Shekh Sahib, Bishan Das Chachaji, Sohan and sister Nimi all tossed in my mind. I waited for Sohan's return, to me, he was not an outsider.

I was up next morning early and Sohan did not disappoint me. I heard his gentle rap on the door and I hastened to open it.

Come in Sohan. Am I glad to see you!

This time rather than my being impatient it was he who could not wait to hear the happenings of the day before. I told him all.

For a long time he was thoughtful. Finally he said: All this Ved, is so ironic, so incongruous! Here you are, making preparations to escape, and then you hand over your lives to the mercy of one Muslim. You tell me about faith and trust but do not lose sight that it is the bugle of religion that the Muslim League leaders have sounded.

Stop Sohan. Don't go on! I don't wish to be disillusioned. You say ironic, you comment about irony in our home. But what about history?

Precisely so, Ved. Like life, history is nothing but a tragic irony. Take the British, for instance. You and I both admire them, think of them as the greatest people on earth, sometimes, even over our nationals. These calculating Britishers were positive almost until the end of the Second World War when the Conservative ministry felt that they had played their cards with good care and that finally their divide and rule policy had reached its climax. They were going to prove to the world how unfit we were to rule ourselves. Well, then, even they miscalculated. Don't you see that? Do you see the irony?

I see it too well.

Yes, they failed to discern the impact of the Congress Party and Gandhiji. They turned out to be much more stupid than you and I could have thought possible. I have been thinking about Chachaji and perhaps this morning I understand him better than I did yesterday. You see, he continued, perhaps Chachaji is too much of a historian. He cannot see the and the contradictions.

The Bugle Sounds

ON the night of the first of March, the few trusted Hindu labourers who had helped build our home were called in and the pipes were installed, leading to Shekh Sahib's house. Whatever attempts had been made to hide the nature of this project, the night had not been dark enough, the labourers not silent enough to prevent the neighbours from discovering that something was going on. They probably dismissed it as something wrong with our water system, for the project on which we were launched was so inexplicable that no one in his right mind would have suspected it. From that night on we started drinking the water of Shekh Sahib and even relishing our own trepidation.

The same Hindu labourers were retained for the night of the second of March to install the steel door which had been smuggled in in a closed van. But they did not show up for the Khizar ministry of Punjab — a coalition of Congress and Unionist parties — resigned that day, touching off a powder keg.

Khizar, the Prime Minister of Punjab, had earned the ill will of Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The Muslims considered him disloyal because he did not cater to all the demands of the Muslim League; the non-Muslims found his indecision unpalatable. He was a man caught in the vice of trying to please two opposing groups, with the result that he antagonized both.

On the next day, the third of March, all the non-Muslim parties — Congress, Hindu and Sikh — held a meeting in the Assembly Chamber in Lahore. They knew that while they could not form a new ministry without the co-operation of the Muslim League, so the League could not form a ministry without their support. Although frightened at the thought of a Muslim League ministry, they decided to withhold their support.

While they were reaching this decision within the

The house was packed, and still the people kept on coming until we were pressed together body to body. Then the leaders appeared. The very presence of Congress Party leaders on the same stage with men like Tara Singh who felt no compulsion to use non violent means to stop the bloodshed seemed to imply the victory of the strong heads and their attitude that, let the Muslims start something the Hindus and Sikhs would retaliate. The leading question was, however, what would they retaliate with? To be sure at the waist of each Sikh hung a *kirpan*, but they were primitive compared to the guns and bombs which had been distributed to the Muslims.

Men like Giani Karter Singh spoke in enraged voices. The crowd responded in unison. With perfect cadence they roared they cheered, they shouted slogans. Their voices clashed against the walls, and echoed back to amplify the ferocious cries.

Then, instantaneously as Tara Singh came forward the cries of the crowd were smothered as though by a great blanket, and the air became heavy and thick with hot moist breathing. Tara Singh delivered his famous words with resolution and heat.

Oh, Hindus and Sikhs! Be ready for self-destruction like the Japanese and the Nazis. Our motherland is calling for blood and we shall satiate the thirst of our mother with blood. By crushing Moghulistan we shall trample Pakistan. I have been feeling for many a day now that mischief has been brewing in the province and for that reason I started reorganizing the Akali Party. If we can snatch the government from the Britishers no one can stop us from snatching the government from the Muslims. We have in our hold the limbs and legs of the Muslim League and we shall break them. Disperse from here on the solemn affirmation that we shall not allow the league to exist. The world has always been ruled by minorities. The Muslims snatched the kingdom from the Hindus, and the Sikhs grabbed it from the hands of the Muslims and the Sikhs will even now rule over them. We shall rule over them and shall get the government, fighting. I have sounded the bugle. Finish the Muslim League!

The malice of Tara Singh's words was contagious and gripped one and all. Men curled their fists and clenched.

vants quarters, where we crouched between the back of the servants quarters and the wall Dazed with the action of the preceding days, I stopped listening There was nothing different to hear no different smells, and I sensed nothing My breathing steadied, and my heart stopped throbbing Was it resignation? Or was it that too much had happened to sort out?

I wondered what was this Hindu religion which had marked us for an ignominious death Religion my father had told us, was an individual matter Hindu religion was a way of life, enriched by centuries

Who were Muslims? For them, religion meant complete abandonment of individual personality In the villages, I had seen them sometimes all eating and drinking from the same containers to show the extent of their brotherly love Their eyes turned five times a day towards Mecca, and they kneeled and prayed to Mohammed They swore by the *Koran*

But in Hinduism, no prophet no one dogma no one sacred book bound believers together Our beliefs were as diverse and various as the climate geography and culture of the country We as individuals might even venerate Mohammed or Christ, as prophets, and still remain Hindus That was the power and pride of Hinduism for it tolerated all religions and embraced all ways of life Muslims, however knew no diversity They were united by one God, one prophet, one book — proselytism was their creed

Was I really a Hindu? I asked myself During childhood I had been profoundly influenced, insofar as a child can be, by the Christian love Since then we had sung hymns at Pindi and at the *sangh*, discussed values and ideals, and tried to conform to those But the values and ideals were of a society where Hindus and Muslims lived side by side, toiled in the fields shoulder to shoulder What was it that set us apart from the Muslims? Our old servant Gian Chand said the Muslim religion taught cruelty

The Muslim children Ved Sahib he said are taught to break Hindu statues Then Sohan said that most Muslims in the Punjab were weavers, cobblers, herdsmen, potters and blacksmiths that their mentality was low They were labourers

The Terror

NEXT morning the telephone jangled Sister Pom was waiting at the railway station and had been there all night

It is traditional in India that a girl returns to her mother's home during her first confinement and even though my father had written to Kakaji pointing out the dangers of sending sister Pom home, she had come. Those like Kakaji who were not living in Punjab or the other exposed areas did not realize the peril we were in the riots in Allahabad on 23 August 1946, and Garh Mukteshwar in the Meerut district on 6 7 and 8 November in which many lives had been lost should have been taken as danger signals

So it was that failing to realize the seriousness of the situation, Kakaji allowed sister Pom to board the train and while we had spent another night sheltered she had endured it sitting on the platform without protection while stabbings had already begun in that neighbourhood. My father rushed to bring her home she was overwrought but safe. If the heavy responsibility for six children had weighed upon him before it was now increased by Pom and her unborn child

On the next day riots broke out all over West Punjab. In Lahore shops were looted and burned. Hindus and Sikhs were stabbed in Gumbi Kinari and Kasera bazaars and Rang Mahal. Those who still doubted that the Muslim League did not have a plan of action should have been convinced for the pattern the riots and mobs followed all over West Punjab was everywhere the same.

Whereas for the few days preceding 4 March we had been comparatively inactive now we rushed about feverishly. We had to install the steel door. All the rooms must be stripped of carpets, curtains, pictures, anything that gave a sign of luxury

terrace of Bishan Das's house to keep watch. The rest of us silently walked to the room which was to be the refuge of all women and children. I felt self-conscious. If only I could see so that I, too, might keep watch on the terrace instead of retreating to a hiding place.

We all had been calm behind the servants' quarters at Chajj's without a roof over our heads, but here where fifty persons crowded into a small room things were different. The women shrieked and moaned, each bewailing her own misfortune. This was the despair of women who might never behold their husbands or sons again. They might be abducted or brutally raped like the women in the other parts of Punjab. We children did not cry, but found a place in the corner where we might huddle unobserved.

I wanted something to happen, something to put an end to the suspense. But it was not to be that night, and the next morning we returned to the uncertain safety of our home.

Even during the daytime there was no security. The shouting and outcries continued unabated, and rumours of murderous raids throughout the city and West Punjab filtered in. Without a doubt, the Muslims had the upper hand, and the Muslim League leaders might well relish their triumph, for it was complete. Some Sikhs tried to mar the glory of their victory by plunging *kirpans* into a few Muslims, but these casualties were too few in number for notice.

We accustomed ourselves to the routine of the terror. We listened to the news on the radio, and that was our sole contact with the outer world. Even at midday it was considered unsafe to leave the security of home. Each afternoon Gian Chand would make the rounds of the Mehta and Mehra families and announce to us that another night had left them unharmed. No one in the family went to school, or to shop. My father alone ventured out to go to his office. He was a doctor, and a government servant. No riots could be allowed to interfere with that obligation. When he left, the question would he return repeatedly haunted us.

If this was the state in one home which in the distant past had experienced happiness and gaiety, then what was

him capable of halting the destruction. Surely, I thought, Sohan would come now to discuss the import of Panditji's visit, but he did not. The twenty first of March—my thirteenth birthday, came and went unnoticed, and still he did not come.

When Pandit Nehru returned to Delhi the leaders of the Congress Party and the Muslim League began once again to debate around the conference table in Delhi while widespread destruction overtook the whole of West Punjab. Trains were looted, houses razed, villages destroyed with their herds, crops and inhabitants. Stabbings multiplied in the cities and rapes and abductions continued in the dominantly Muslim areas.

It was not surprising that the Hindus and Sikhs in West Punjab were growing impatient with the ineffectual haggling around the Delhi conference table and were crying for the Hindu and Sikh brothers in India to act, not talk, and come to their aid immediately.

Yet what could the Congress Party do? They had been devoted to the cause of independence for united India too long to abandon it now. History and logic were on their side, for the cultural and economic ties bound India as one nation.

Worn out by tedious negotiation, fatigued by continuous rebukes from the Muslim League, frustrated to find that their years of long labour were to be rendered futile, unable to bear the prolonged pressure for action from Hindus and Sikhs in West Punjab and, finally convinced that almost all Muslims in West Punjab had responded to the call of religion and Jinnah, the Congress leaders conceded Pakistan in May 1947. But if they had any hopes that this concession would end the chaos and anarchy, they were very much mistaken, for the Muslims in the Punjab hailed this as another indication of their strength and power against the servility of the Hindus. They were not satisfied with this first victory and they thought that by spurring their mobs on to fresh riots they could secure all of Punjab and Bengal for Pakistan. But the Congress was under no misapprehensions that once Pakistan was formed the cries for Hindu and Sikh blood would subside. They faced the grim possibility that all the Hindus and Sikhs in West Punjab would have to

evacuated and if all of Punjab were lost this task could never be performed

For once an Englishman Lord Mountbatten sided against the Muslims and considered their demand for all of Punjab and all of Bengal exorbitant and unreasonable. So the Congress leaders stood firm with Lord Mountbatten as their backbone on the ground that the province of Punjab and Bengal would be divided rather than ceded in their entirety. Subsequently boundary commissions were set up to determine the exact lines of demarcation.

All these negotiations did not stop the atrocities of the Muslims in West Punjab and even though in Lahore there was a momentary lull after the hectic day of early March we were never able to resume the natural course of life. There was always a steel door for the flaring rumours of where the mob would strike next and news of another stabbing to remind us of altered times.

But all this struggle was not destructive. On 16 April a child was born to Pom, a fine healthy boy. Yet the times had the red edge for no festivity, no celebration greeted him even though he was the first grandson. Our concern for sister Pom increased. She was too weak and the child too young to permit us to execute our plan of escape safely.

About the middle of May the riots in Lahore broke out with the same intensity as they had during the March days. For four consecutive nights we had to abandon our home each night more convinced than before that it would be for the last time. Now it was the fifth night and as always we were standing on the terrace where we could keep in touch with the other houses and take full advantage of the view. Sister Pom tired of standing was sitting on the steps with her baby only a month old, with Ashraf slowly moving to sister Pom now returning to his other brother and sisters. Soon he fell asleep on the small bed which had been moved there earlier for sister Pom's use.

My sisters kept watching back the silence only to estimate the exact location of the various fires. Some of them seemed no more than half a mile from our home. The vile shrieks and

sounds to which we should by now have grown accustomed, though we had not, vibrated through the sultry night. As always in the month of May, there was no noticeable movement of air, the days had been stifling, the temperature running as high as 115 degrees. Finally, once again clasping hands we slowly descended the stairs, brother Om and Father following.

Within the four walls where once sobs and moans had given vent to the terror of women, we were now surrounded by the quietude of enervated women too spent, too resigned to cry out. Never was the scene of our first night's exodus repeated. Drill after drill had made these women trained and proficient.

For a quick death each one of them carried poison, firearm or razor-edged blade. If anything remained to sustain them, it was the value of honour and courage, the principles of renunciation and suffering practised by untold centuries of Hindus.

As I held Ashok, I thought of the day he had arrived, then his near loss with meningitis, how he had tugged at my mother's *sari* and crawled on the carpets. Many a time I had scolded him for entering my room and tinkering with my electrical equipment. I had always been afraid in case I forgot to unplug all of it and Ashok, unable to resist the urge to copy his brother, would try to make it hum.

Being the youngest, he was pampered by everyone and almost nothing was denied him. Whereas before he had been noisy and full of life, ever since the March days he had tried to make himself invisible, or so it seemed. Now he lay still and he had even returned to sucking his thumb.

Bombs exploded outside. The mob sounded no farther away than the gate of Bishan Das's house and at any moment we expected to hear shooting break out which might deter their onrush for a time. But fate was not to end our existence that night either, and once again at dawn we passed through the steel door.

Next day, Sheikh Sahib came and earnestly told us that our house had barely escaped the mob. If we would not relent in sending my sisters to his house, we had better get them out of Lahore. He said it enigmatically, as though he knew more than we did, and was aware of the mob's next move.

His visit combined with the fresh assaults on Lahore since the conceding of Pakistan determined my father to send us away and for once he did not ask for advice or heed my sisters' attempts to dissuade him. That day he would go to Uncle Daulat Ram and ask him to send his daughters away also. My sisters pleaded with Mother once he had left that they would be more apprehensive away from Lahore, not knowing what had happened to her and Father. But it seemed Mother and Father had reached their decision together and she was just as firm as he.

All this time I did not know that their decision affected me as well. But when my father returned he said Uncle Daulat Ram wanted to send his sons away and they had determined that Pav and I should leave too. My father seemed taken up with the idea that he wanted everyone to leave but him, but Mother stubbornly persisted that I would hear none of it and if Mother remained, Alok must stay also. Sister Prem was to leave that night for Dhruv and the rest of us were to board the train for Bombay the next day even though trains were sporadically stopped by the mobs and the passengers looted and slain.

Despite the dire predictions of all those who learned that we were to cross the border by train, our journey was uninterrupted by the Muslim mobs. But the emotional state of us all made the trip a ythug but peaceful. An old woman near us kept up a ceaseless stream of verdicts and forebodings and the wailings and outcries of the frightened and lonely and bereaved only served to augment our own sense of loss.

All through the journey the journey across the hot and dry plains back toward Bombay I kept thinking about Sohan who had always treated me as though I were his brother, equal to understanding the shade of his opinions and moods. I kept wishing that the little boy who had bought me word of Sohan's death the night of our departure had been wrong. But in that train reality was too much with me.

'Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan'

THE drum rolled outside and the band tuned up to greet the eve of independence but the spirited music was flat to our ears. For us, on that 15 August, Independence Day meant that we could never return to Lahore.

We had spent two months in Bombay with my father's nephew, Cousin Anand. There was almost nothing for us to do except remain in the house and since we had no idea how prolonged our stay would be, we could make no plans for the future. In peaceful Bombay, business went on as usual but when conditions took a turn for the worse in West Punjab other relatives came to stay in the four room apartment until the number swelled to seventeen. In spite of these cramped quarters where we had to sleep on the floor we were reasonably happy for regularly streams of letters arrived from Mother assuring us of the safety of those at home.

In Lahore, she said, things had improved slightly since our departure in May, though the situation in West Punjab had progressively grown worse. But now and again we would detect a note in her letters which revealed that their position was increasingly precarious. It was only a matter of days she said in one of her later letters, before the massacres which were sweeping the countryside would reach Lahore, but they hoped to get out soon.

Her last letter, written on the third of August left us with grave concern. My father, as head of the department, was charged with dividing the assets between East and West Punjab. This responsibility she thought, would delay him beyond the tenth of August the date by which all Hindu officers and the Hindu police had been told to be across the border.

PAKISTAN AND TRANSITION

We knew this would delay them beyond the safety of the present lull even though the boundary commission had not drawn the exact line of demarcation and many inhabitants believed that Lahore might be included in India. Whether awarded to Pakistan or India, however, the fate of Lahore would be the same for the Muslims would launch another onslaught which would put all human cooperation. Lured by the prospect of becoming wealthier, the Hindus were excited that Muslims would express their resentment in a frenzy of destruction. Although partly that middle-class Hindus and Sikhs, nevertheless, the party would be used by the Muslim League leaders to generate discontent to the anger of the masses.

Our anxiety was increased when Mehr wrote that Chachaji refused to leave Lahore and that all my father's attempts to dissuade him were met with a stiff buff. He believed that once the tide of Pakistan was firmly established, no normal conditions would resume and all Hindus would be obliged to return to their homes. He had eagerly purchased his education, the two months since our departure and assured himself that he would right after all, be a great national hero and Muslims would come to terms. Chachaji had, however, unconsciously betrayed yet he could not believe in unity and to give credit to human nature, he had been deceived.

Nana was at the airport on Monday morning on the Arabian Sea. He noted that Lahore was ablaze and the fate of the prediction had materialized. We tried to call our parents but the telephone line had been cut. Indeed, the case was no communication between East and West Punjab. We tried to call at Amritsar, the first city across the border in East Punjab, but checked for the first time, but found that the circuits were overloaded with all booked days before.

Night after night we had sat up waiting for the telephone to ring or the telegraph messenger to knock. In a fitful doze I dreamed I was back in Lahore and creeping through the steel door only to catch another wall. This waiting in mournful silence with mind filled with happy and tragic memories seemed

more painful than any physical torture we might have experienced at the hands of the Muslims

The glorious music of the triumphant band blared on in martial concert, lifting emotions until people shouted jubilantly and danced to its rhythm while the Army marched with its guns on shoulder and shoes polished. An hour away was independence for the country, but it seemed a hollow celebration. We had seen too much of freedom in Lahore: the freedom to loot and to kill.

The only comfort I could derive from all this was that we still had hope, but I was soon melancholy again when I thought of how many hundreds of thousands were meeting the day without hope and the words of my father flashed through my mind:

What will matter in these times is not property but life.

We gave no second thoughts to the house or the luxury of having separate rooms and beds to sleep in, though I recalled with grief my loss of friendship with Sohan and Mr Khanna.

But to this melancholy mood was added anger when I thought about the recent utterances of Gandhi. He was asking Hindus and Sikhs to remain where they were and be strong and strength to him meant resistance to conversion unto death, stoicism and non-violence even as you saw your daughters abducted, your wife murdered. He was demanding spiritual strength from people tortured beyond endurance.

I knew my repudiation of Gandhi's ideals was a rejection of those I too had held, and had I not been so overwhelmed by personal emotion I might have reproached myself. Now I felt a slight exhilaration return as I thought that the long cries for action by the suffering non-Muslims in West Punjab had finally been heeded. It took five months of systematic annihilation in West Punjab before the Hindus and Sikhs abandoned their policy of non-violence and fought back. By the end of July enough refugees had begun drifting in to dramatize vividly the reports which had preceded them. Their harrowing tales and their mere presence moved their previously passive Sikh and Hindu brothers to ruthless retaliation. Eager for revenge I was happy to read in the papers that Hindus and Sikhs, with the M

had started taking pride in the number each personally had slain. If I had been lucky enough to kill two or three Muslims I too would have boasted with pride of the accomplishment. Gandhi's ideals were faded.

The fifteenth of August came and went. Now the new India was a day old and still there was no word from our parents. Then the thick heavy silence was pierced with the sharp ringing of the telephone. It was our parent. They with Om and Ashok had crossed the border but had not been able to persuade Chachaji to leave Lahore. They had been relies upon and told us that if any had been able to get away from the city after the twelfth of August though many had tried and lost their lives. They had spent the last night in Amritsar and had many other thousands of destitute refugees and they asked us to come to Delhi to meet them as soon as possible.

Ever since I had started attending RSSS and had come to know Johan I had begun to doubt whether Hindu and Muslims could ever live together amicably as they had in times past. There was always a possibility that another man like Jinnah would try to out by making his cause one with Hindus but would not make a clean break from them and using religion as his basis would start again in the circle of religious strife. The whole bloody story would be repeated once more and it seemed to me at the time that the only way to avoid another tragedy was never to give Muslims the chance to abuse leadership.

Knowing Sohan brave and vigorous ready to sacrifice his life in the name of the new Hindu India had moved me deeply and his blunt assertions that the work of Gandhi and other Congress leaders was done had not left me untouched. During those furious restless days when we waited for the telephone to ring I had become increasingly convinced by Sohan's logic. I too could then have shouted India for Hindus — *Hindu Hindu Hindu*.

Yet now that my fears about my parents had been alleviated I felt more sober thoughts returning reproaching me for my

change of heart On the one hand I felt that Hindus and Muslims could live side by side, and on the other that the only way the religious strife could resolve itself was by the formation of a state where Hindus, the majority ruled

Disturbed by these contradictory thoughts I finally went to sister Nimi who was an ardent supporter of Gandhi The words of Sohan came back to me that it was not the non violence of Gandhi but the decency of the British Government which respected his methods that had led to independence, and I wondered if she agreed with this

Her response was immediate British people decent? My foot! Was it their decency that made them imprison the leaders who protested against their enslavement? Was it their sense of decency that turned Muslims against Hindus? If Gandhiji had died fasting even Britishers with all their might could not have ruled India any longer They let him continue his hunger strike as long as they did simply because they did not realize its effectiveness They always kept a close eye on Gandhiji so that they might come to the rescue before anything happened to him

Granting that's so couldn't it be said that Gandhiji has done his work? He's too idealistic to face the Muslim threat You and I have seen their orgy in the name of religion

But you can't condemn all Muslims for the work of their leaders What would you have us do? Wipe out all Muslims? That would mean we Hindus would launch an orgy as bad as the Muslims

No but you could deny them a share in the Indian Government Hindus have no voice in the Pakistan Government so why should the Muslims have any in India? You would also rule out the possibility of another leader like Jinnah

Just the opposite might happen sister Nimi replied You can't ever subjugate a race of people Eventually they would rebel and under a leader probably much more ruthless than Jinnah Besides, when you subjugate Muslims you are enslaving some of your own kind No Gandhiji's work is far from done There are too many people like you who are beginning

Refugees

A WEEK or two after our parents call we returned from Bombay to Delhi. The same atmosphere which had prevailed in Lahore during the March and May days seemed to have gripped Delhi too. During our two-week stay there the city was convulsed with outrages patterned after the too-successful methods of West Punjab, and we were once again caught up in a climate of nervous tension and anxiety.

While in Delhi we learned that all the Mehta and Mehra families had escaped from Lahore without casualty. Even Chachaji, who had been the last to leave Lahore, had miraculously reached Delhi. We heard, however, that our distant relatives in Sheikhupura district had not been so fortunate; they had met death at the hands of the Muslims.

Almost every one of those who escaped from Lahore came without their possessions, and those who had once enjoyed large homes now lived in one room. We were staying with one of our uncles in Delhi, where thirty people were crammed into only four rooms.

Meanwhile my father had been asked to proceed immediately to Simla, the capital of East Punjab, so our parents did not meet us at Delhi. At last, when it was considered relatively safe, we left our uncle's house and went to Simla.

Our parents had not been able to bring anything with them from Lahore, and the small official house which was allotted to us stayed unfurnished for nearly three months. The cold nights of this hill station forced us all to stay in, wrapped in our bed clothes, for at the time we could not get fuel. Even during the daytime, we scarcely left home, for we had only summer clothes.

My father was now posted as a director, and had taken over the whole Public Health Department in East Punjab. He spent

some time in Simla grappling with the dimensionless problems which had come into being as more and more refugees poured across the border in convoys miles long each bearing the marks of the tragedy in his family and without an *anna* or a promise of shelter ahead. By December 1947 three months after the independence no less than four million people had been evacuated from what was now Pakistan.

A considerable part of Father's work consequently was done in the plains where the refugee camps spread miles square. The Hindu and Sikh retaliation was still continuing with great ferocity and so it was not considered safe for my sisters to leave Simla. I was allowed however to accompany my father a few times. We travelled with a police escort and stopped at various refugee camps where he made detailed inspections in order to plan further attacks on the problems of sanitation and epidemics. Day in and day out powdered milk, packaged foods and accoutrements were flown or brought to these camps. All the services co-operated to meet this desperate problem of providing for a rehabilitation of these refugees.

I remember my first impression of a refugee camp. It was a huge sprawling encampment near Ambala and we reached there in the early part of the afternoon. Two of my father's assistants joined us there and we began the tour. While my father conferred with the inspectors and other health officers, I sensed the appalling surroundings. If there was ever a pathetic sight I imagined this was it.

The foul smell of human filth and the odour of the sick and dying were overpowering. Flies droned and crawled all about begging for food and mother tried to distract them from their hunger. Medical attendants followed the flies and jabbed needles into the arms of children too weary to wince or cry. Then inoculated women and men. The men who had once worked their own land ploughed and sowed through long days and provided for their families for longer with us now sat idle so apathetic that we stumbled across them and still they did not move.

Everywhere one encountered there were stories of unbelievable atrocities. Even if margin were allowed for refugees' exaggerations

ting their own misfortunes their treatment had been hideous. Some talked more readily than others but many of them were too dazed to speak. As one of the inspectors was inoculating we approached him. My father, pressing my hand said quietly that the man being inoculated had no hands.

As the inspector rapidly moved away to another refugee, I stood by the man and tried to speak to him. From his first few softly spoken words, I gathered that he was a Sikh and like all Sikhs had been marked by his long hair and beard as sure prey for the Muslims. He asked: Where did it happen to you? — my blindness had often been mistaken by the refugees as one more inhuman act of the Muslims.

We lived in Lahore, I answered but it wasn't the Muslims. There was a long pause. Your hands — how did that happen?

In a *gurudwara*. We expected them. We had been sleeping there for four nights. The fifth night they came. They told us to come out and they wouldn't make trouble. Become Muslims, they said and return to your homes. But we would never change our faith.

I had heard of some Hindu villages where the villagers had embraced Islam. Even their daughters had been forcibly married to Muslim hooligans. But most never considered changing their faith, even though it meant losing all their possessions and seeing their families tortured and slain.

They besieged the *gurudwara* for two nights and a day. Our ammunition ran out the first night. Our supplies were gone, too.

From there the story was no different from that of a hundred other villages where the temple had been forced by the mob. The men had begun killing their own women to save them from torture and rape.

This Sikh was able to kill his daughter but had hesitated a moment and was overpowered before he could put his wife to death. He resisted and thought he had killed one Muslim before they hacked off his hands then slashed his ears. They would have tortured him to death but through some impossible

strength born of rage he broke from their hands to follow the men who were carrying his wife. In the thick of the mob he had lost them but escaped himself. He had hidden for a week without food until a lorry of Sikh police had carried him to the colony.

But all refugees were not so stunned as this Sikh. Their misery had made them now to avenge the deaths of their loved ones. Whenever you talked to them about non violence and Gandhi their response was immediate.

Gandhi did not let his daughter raped.

Gandhi didn't let his wife

Some went even further accusing him of cowardice and saying that he was afraid to come to Punjab. But only one payer meeting with Gandhi in the Delhi refugee camps was enough to convince me that he suffered even more than those who had experienced violence and bloodshed first hand and that his world was above cowardice or consideration of self.

The heavy snow had not yet begun to fall to fill the streets and shut each family up around the hearth for the long Simla winter. By now in early December we began to have a small fire in the fireplace provided our sole warmth against the frosts and winds that chilled the hill station. We clustered around it in comfortable chairs which the government finally provided. Mother knitted my sisters' cardigans. Ashok was busy rattling his crayons a little as he worked on a colour book. I also was doing nothing.

This routine of idleness had never preyed so heavily on my mind as it did now. Before in Pindi there had been spacious compounds, the friendship of Saal Chakran and fish to distract me from the continuous reminder that I was doing nothing. Then too in Pindi the thought that one day I would return to school perhaps go to America with all our family packed into a lorry had been the cure to sustain me in my idle moments. Now even that was in the past.

In less than three years the government's plan of compulsory retirement at fifty-five would force my father to give up his job.

our government home and all the privileges of service. As we had lost all our property and belongings in Lahore every bit of his present salary had to be saved to make provision for this retirement. We no longer spoke of America.

While in Pindi and Lahore, at least a music teacher had been engaged to take up some slack in the time here in Simla even that could not be done. All my musical instruments *tabla tam bura sitar* and harmonium had been left behind and no teacher here could add to my progress. The few Braille books I had started collecting in Lahore on my return to school had been lost to Pakistan also. Even my electric transformers and carpentry tools were gone.

Day after day for two months I passed the time in this state of inaction, each day contributing to the depression of the next. I longed for something anything to do but in this forsaken hill station there was no distraction. I was now approaching my fourteenth birthday. Brother Om at the age of fourteen had started attending college. I had had, altogether three years of school a little over two and a half of which had been spent in Bombay when I was very young.

One day I had asked sister Nimi if she might not read to me from a book as Mr Khanna had suggested but she did all her reading in English, and being educated in a convent had not even learned to read Hindi. This from the very outset barred me from any pleasure I might have derived from reading for my English vocabulary was comparable to that of a nine year-old Indian child attending school.

There was as yet no standard Hindi Braille, and everything for the use of the blind was written in English. I had written to the National Institute for the Blind in England for some books so that I could start studying English on my own but they had not yet arrived. Besides I had not been able to learn grade two Braille in which most good writing was transcribed.

Even though I said nothing about my state of mind to my parents it was too obvious to go unnoticed. They saw me sitting continually in one chair at the end of the semi-circle, occasionally interrupted by Ashok to help him with his Meccano set, to

tighten a screw or bend a strip for his home made windmill But they like myself refrained from discussing what seemed hopeless

One evening while we sat as usual in the drawing room Father who had been away in the plains returned unexpectedly with welcome news for me Through Lady Mountbatten (with whom he was looking after the refugee camps and convoys) he had come to know Sir Clutha Mackenzie a totally blind Englishman who was directing St Dunstan's Hostel for the war blinded in Dehra Dun He was the first highly educated blind person that my father had ever met and he had been much impressed by his learning and abilities

Father had talked to him about me and asked if I might be admitted to St Dunstan's as that was considered the best training centre for the blind in India Sir Clutha Mackenzie considered this most improbable as no civilian had ever been admitted to this hostel for the war blinded

My father had insisted upon my at least meeting him if for no other reason than that he would be an inspiration So when he returned to the plain I accompanied him and was introduced to Sir Clutha While I could not understand all he said in English I did converse with him my father prompting Though I told very little of my state of mind it seemed to me he comprehended amazingly well how I felt He promised to take up my case with the government

Within a week time I was told that a special exception had been made and I could attend morning classes in Braille and typing at St Dunstan's I had not been separated from my family since the time I had spent in Bombay and my mother remarked that I seemed too happy to leave them

St Dunstan's was so much of a contrast from Dadar and Emerson schools that at first I felt completely lost It was a beautiful place which had once been a residence for the bodyguard force of the English governor general and like most army encampments was located at the outskirts of the city Since those who follow the right path in life have a difficult time with mobility long wires were stretched across the sprawling campus

from barracks to barracks, the buildings that were now dormitories and classrooms

The classroom atmosphere was as wholesome as that of the huge compound with its scores of lichee trees. There were no boys standing at the door of a class swinging a fan or instructors with wet canes. I came in contact with only two teachers: Mr Cameron, the typing instructor and Mr Advani who taught Braille, both of whom were blind.

I remember the first day I walked into typing class. Mr Cameron greeted me. He was an Anglo Saxon and spoke with a strong Scottish accent. His handshake was nervous but hearty. He introduced me to the only other student then in the classroom. I remember my shock at putting my hand forward and meeting a steel hook. The man had lost both his arms at the elbows. He used this steel hook to type and I believe his speed was twenty or twenty five words a minute. Later on as I grew to know him better, I often unscrewed his steel hook to insert other instruments, such as a knife or fork.

There was an unexpected advantage in being taught by Mr Cameron. He could only speak English and since I spent one hour with him alone, he had ample time to tutor me in that language as well as teach me typing. Mr Advani taught me grade two Braille, the more complex Braille which includes contractions and abbreviations. I became quite adept and was even chosen as one of the students to read when Lady Mountbatten visited the school.

My stay in Dehra Dun was not only fruitful but happy. I was allowed to take out Braille books and magazines from their small library and for the first time I was able to do some reading. While I missed my family, I did value my independence and my serious studies which for the first time could be considered as academic progress.

I had almost no friends there, for all the students were beyond my age, full grown men, the majority of whom had been recently blinded in the Second World War. They were not well adjusted to their blindness and it was considered best that I come in close contact with them as little as possible. Indeed, if it

not been for Kakaji and sister Pom who lived in Dehra Dun, or the Braille books which occupied my time I would have been quite homesick.

I stayed at St Dunstan's Hostel only eight months for Captain Mortimer who had taken command from Sir Clutha MacKenzie wrote to my father in September 1948 telling him that he felt I had learned all St Dunstan's had to offer and that I should now pursue the possibility of higher education. He added that I had done well on occasion substituting for the Braille master but that however much they welcomed me the company of resentful and discouraged seamen was not good for an impressionable young boy. He felt that I who did not regard my blindness as a visitation of the gods was ready for the next step. Since India could offer me nothing more in the way of education the next step meant the West - a step in a sense made easier for me by the inspiring examples of Mr Cameron and Sir Clutha MacKenzie.

On a Sunday morning in the month of October 1948 my father and I left our cottage in Simla for Clarke's Hotel. We had started out early so that we might take a leisurely walk and so that I might have ample time to relax from my excitement.

On our way we talked about the forthcoming interview with Mr Baldwin a representative of a large American corporation.

Americans generally are easy-going people. They're understanding and even if you make a mistake it won't matter. Just don't be nervous.

Yet I was nervous. All night I had tosed in my bed thinking about the next day with fear and excitement. So much depended on this interview for Mr Baldwin had promised to try to make some arrangement through his company for financial assistance as his corporation was considering awarding scholarships to Indian students in America in recognition of its expanding business in new India.

Suppose my father continued - suppose Mr Baldwin is not impressed. It doesn't matter. Remember I am always there. We'll manage somehow.

I don't want it to be that way, I answered him 'You have too many responsibilities

But if my children aren't my responsibility, what is? From the very day you lost your sight I set my heart on giving you as good an education, or a better one, as the rest of my children. You have waited a long time

Yes but you had no idea about Pakistan and all its consequences

Remember your grandfather's circumstances. No man in his position could have dreamed of sending his children to England. Yet he did. The sacrifices I made to send you children to school are nothing compared to his. I tell you son, education is in our blood

That phrase from his diary. I would sell my soul to give Ved an education, came back to me and I was moved to tears

We finally reached Clarke's Hotel and my father sent his card up to Mr Baldwin's room before we climbed the stairs ourselves

'Is this the young fellow, Mr Baldwin began, taking my hand, that you talked about, Doctor?

This is he, sir

Come on, take a seat, son and he led me to a chair

I had not met many Americans for most of my father's friends before independence had been British. The mere sound of a British accent, and English spoken in that crisp firm way had delighted me

Mr Baldwin, however spoke fast less deliberately and with a nasal twang to his voice. At first I was taken aback for I could not understand what he was saying but his friendliness put me at ease. After chatting with my father for a while, he came to me and stood behind my chair

I understand you want to go to America

I nodded

You know that's a long way from your home

He asked me to sketch what education I had received. India. I was ashamed to tell him that altogether my studies

occupied less than four years. Hearing my answers he was silent and I sensed his disappointment.

You have a *Reader's Digest* there, he finally began. Would you read an article for me? His easy-going manner had become brisk and business-like. He searched through his desk and found a printed copy of the same month.

I had rehearsed one article and had learned the meaning of the word implying that he would ask me to read an article of my choice. But to my dismay and great nervousness he said:

There's a good article here about American youth and the effect of comic books. I think you'll find that interesting. Can you find it here?

With my untidy fingers I ran through the contents once without success and then again this time more slowly but I could hardly recognize the words beneath my fingers. At last I found it. All this time he had remained behind the chair and I felt very uneasy thinking how he was watching my trembling finger. At last I turned to the table, I pressed my fingers down on the desks trying to steady them and held my arms close to my side. At the very first when I tumbled but neither my father nor he came to my rescue. When I came to words like manifest destiny, imperialism, I could hardly pronounce them let alone understand their meaning. Rather than reading fluently when understanding I isolated words from their context, paying no heed to punctuation. He topped me at one place, a dark dot I understood what a particular sentence meant. I did not.

Then a typewriter was brought in and he started dictating to me from the same article. If I could only steady my fingers. I thought I typed the first sentence using the third row instead of the middle one, a terrible mistake. I never did get my bearings after that. I typed a double space then typed over again. By the end of fifty-five minutes the interview was over and I knew I had failed miserably.

My head was heavy from the sleepless night before, and I did not follow all the exchange between my father and Mr.

Baldwin, but I did understand one sentence which dashed all my hopes and plunged me into despair

I want to be frank, Doctor I think this boy should stay here.'

Then he went on to say that my language handicap and the very mediocre quality of my educational foundation would stand me in poor stead when I competed with students who had been at school since the age of six

But I'll write to a friend in my company back home acquaint him with your unusual circumstances and try to find out what can be done

With this sentence, which was added more as a courtesy than a guarantee that some future arrangements would be made, my father and I left

As we descended the stairs, I experienced a keen sense of frustration. Students who had been in school since they were six years old, he had said. They would be the ones I would compete against. What was my education as compared with theirs? I knew almost nothing about arithmetic. My English though considerably improved during my stay at St Dunstan's was poor. My experience in Braille reading was slight. All the talking of Mr Khanna about the vagueness of my ambitions for education had not disconcerted me as much as this one interview.

'Success my father was saying depends on determination and perseverance and disappointments should strengthen rather than shake them. I will stand behind you and you will go to England or America even if you have no financial assistance or as far as that goes, no admission. Don't forget, child that I myself went to England without promise of admission. Once you are there, they won't send you back.

His words were not without effect. His voice betrayed no sign of disappointment, and he spoke as confidently as he always had. As I walked beside him holding his large surgeon's hand, I revived a bit. There was something contagious about his confidence, and in spite of all my reservations about my own

'We all agree ..'

WE both agree that it would be a mistake to bring your son over to England during the most formative years of his life. We have had two Indian students at our secondary school for blind boys in Worcester and both of them on their return have found themselves ill adjusted to Indian life, and out of touch with the interests of their people.

bringing these boys to England appears not altogether to be doing them a kindness.

it is essential that he should not be too early subjected to Western influence.

These were answers given by education authorities in Europe and the United States to letters seeking my admission to a school of higher education. They were echoed with monotonous exactitude until one might have thought they were written with one pen.

There was yet another question they asked for which neither my father nor I had an answer. What does he want to do with his education, does he want to specialize in anything? The only reply approaching a satisfactory answer that we could give them was perhaps learning Western music. Ever since I had left Dadra I had been tutored in Indian music in which direction I had shown considerable talent. Since my sister's music teacher in Lahore Master Kohli was, although blind, one of the most successful musicians in Punjab it was thought this would be a good means of livelihood for me.

This possibility had gained weight with my father when he noticed that songs coloured with Western touches which were composed for the film industry were received with enthusiastic applause by Indian audiences. He thought I might well be a pioneer in improving Indian music which is almost

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melody by bringing about a fusion of Eastern melody and
We te n ha m y

I had reservations about pursuing this career. I knew nothing about Western music and I might not be at all talented by Western standards. So I was honest in admitting to the Western authorities that I had not the slightest notion as to what type of education I wanted or for what purpose. Needless to say this did not improve my chances of enlisting their support. I longed for a good solid academic education equal to the one my sisters and brother were getting. If I did not know what I should do with it it was simply because I was young and because very few blind people in India had ever possessed it.

When I had finally decided to start seeking admission to one of the institutions in the West the first practical hurdle was where to begin. When to approach Perkins was the only institution of which I had previously heard, so my first letter was written to them. Next I looked through the flyleaf of my Baille books for addresses of publishers. I had been told at St. Dunstan's that these institutions not only published but took an active part in promoting education for the blind.

So I wrote to the National Institute for the Blind, London and the American Printing House in Louisville, Kentucky. In answer to these letters that I received answers like those quoted above. The easy attempt to dissuade them only increased their conviction that I should at least visit India.

I searched feverishly for more addresses in my Braille books and magazine. I found only two others, one in Edinburgh and one in Paris. The one in Edinburgh turned out to be an asylum and referred me back to the National Institute. In my letter to Paris I said that my last suggestion was to study in France though I knew not a word of that language which they were quick to point out. So I reached a dead end until another idea occurred to me.

I wrote to the American Printing House for the Blind asking them to send me a list of the literature published so that I might select some more magazines to read. This list I knew would include the addresses of various schools in the United States.

which had their Braille newspapers published at the Printing Press. On its arrival, indiscriminately I hammered out letters to most every place listed, claiming that their school alone would meet my need. Within two months I had written to twenty people and awaited expectantly their answers. I made the postman promise to deliver our mail first and each time I would take the letters to sister Nimi with my hands trembling. She would open and read them to herself quickly and the silence which followed made me understand that one more unfavourable reply had come. At first she tried to console me by saying that all was not over yet but by and by she gave up and began to cry, and I would be the one to keep a brave face in her presence, only to return to my room and break down.

This universal opinion of the authorities should have convinced anyone but it did not change our course much. Even if they were too subjective, too consumed by my own ambition and would not appreciate their argument, my father, objective as he was, should have encouraged me to abandon for the present my desire to go. But he did the opposite. He himself wrote to many authorities entreating them to reconsider.

I tried to occupy the empty, anxious days and in some measure check my growing disappointment by reading whatever Braille material I could get my hands on, from St Dunstan's or England or America. If my correspondence was indiscriminate, my reading was no better directed. I read religious magazines like the *Millie Baptist* and the *Discovery*, various digests and some fiction. Thus I had the consolation of not resuming my fireside seat at the end of the semi-circle with empty hands.

Three months of uninterrupted waiting and disappointment seemed finally approaching an end for my addresses were being answered. About then, Cousin Anand, under whose protection I had spent the months after leaving Lahore, visited us.

Though he was my father's nephew, to us he had been like another father. My father had played an important role in helping me receive his education. He had just returned from America and I felt a keen sense of satisfaction in talking to someone who had recently been to a place where I so longed to go. It

same type of satisfaction sweet melan holy which I used to experience sitting by the radio listening to (and not always understanding) a broadcast in English from the BBC Australia or India

One day the topic of my going to America came up and my father asked him his opinion

You want my honest opinion? I began

Yes

I don't think he ought to go. Supposing he did get all the education he wants. What will he do with it? You know yourself how many young people there are in this country today with B.A.s and M.A.s who can't get a job. And they can see

The influence from his own people at this age would be most harmful. Their world, their way of life is very different. Conflicting cultural backgrounds will make him a misfit. He will belong neither here nor there. I think he would be happier if he stayed in India. Got what little education he could and took up music more seriously. He will be more than self-sufficient deriving satisfaction from his music and be close to all of us so that we can give him help when he needs it.

My heart sank. I knew how much my father respected Cousin Anand's opinion. What he said seemed so sensible and true. All the letters agreed. He had just returned from America and even visited the American Printing House. I knew his opinion was held by almost all our relatives but they were not as candid, knowing my wilfulness and my father's determination. All the workers in the field of education for the blind gave the same arguments.

Yet there was one thing. He spoke of happiness. At night when I lay in bed I had often wondered about it. Could I ever be happy just teaching music like Panditji? Could I bear to abandon forever my desire to seek further learning? Perhaps if I had not been brought up in a family where everyone talked of nothing but education making me feel always apart from them and perhaps if there had been no talk of going West for me I would probably have been happy being a music teacher like Master Kohli.

As I had expected, the next day my father opened the subject with me when we were alone

You know, he said, what little money I've saved for you can be used any way you wish. You could continue to study Indian music and still have enough left over perhaps to open a small shop. There is no doubt in my mind that this way you will be self supporting and independent.

Besides, as Cousin Anand says, you would be close to all of us. Leaving home, son, is no easy matter. I did it in my younger days, and it was hard enough. In your case it would be even harder.

'Going West is, at best, a most hazardous undertaking. We do not know how your small education compares with that of other boys there. You may have to start from the fifth or sixth grade, and the longest I could support you would be three to four years, perhaps another year if we borrowed money. But you wouldn't have even finished high school by then. Meanwhile all the money would be gone and you would not be able to pursue your Indian music. Nor would I have anything left for you to open a shop. If Pakistan hadn't happened I could have given you as much education as you might have wished but now it's quite different. Beyond anything else, there can be nothing more miserable than to be a misfit in your own home and country.

I remembered the refugee camps. The image of the homeless refugee with his ear slashed passed across my mind. So many had lost so much! What was my ambition compared to the land and lives sacrificed to the birth of Pakistan?

I can reconcile myself, I said swallowing hard, to anything.

Father put his hand on my shoulder. Something may work out but right now it looks pretty hopeless, he said.

Can I still go on writing to foreign schools, just on the chance of some encouragement? I asked.

Of course, he said.

I promise, Daddyji, I said, I will try to learn to be happy here.

'Yes'

It was seven in the morning and I was awakened by brother Om who was leaning over my bed looking through the frosty window. Soon my sister joined him in searching the sky for the balloon which would indicate safe kati g.

I suppose it didn't freeze last night. Umi said in a disappointed voice.

Then brother Om shouted and there were exclamations of pleasure as they caught sight of the signal.

They left me in the partitioned-off end of our sun porch. But the Om could not find his skates so I got up to help him. The house was but lightly cold and some icy air came in through the cracks around the window. At last all paraphernalia were collected and everyone dressed in heavy coats and left the house.

Almost every day in the weather was clear and cold enough to freeze the ground. My sister and brother Om spent three hours in the morning together in the evening ice skating. I alone could not take part in this sport of the Simla hill station. At first they took me to the rink and I stood at the edge listening to the blaring music and shout of the skaters. But I had put a stop to this. I preferred staying home to standing alone at the edge while one would talk to me.

I stood for a while now holding at the open door. I tentatively faded as they hurried up the hill toward the skating rink. Finally I shut the door and returned to bed.

Only when I could keep warm—but I could not go to sleep again. With everyone gone and Mother and Ashok not so close seemed so scary indeed.

So I picked up my Braille book to read but my finger with cold and I gave up. Finally after two hours I gave up school to wait.

'YES'

I had missed several schools on the list, most of them in the southern part of the United States. As I had not even heard the names of the states they were located in, I felt no particular desire to go there. I wanted to go to Boston, New York, Chicago or San Francisco. For me, that was the United States. Nevertheless, I decided to try them all.

I wrote a letter to Arkansas School for the Blind, presenting my meagre qualifications as impressively as I could.

Simla

31st January 1949

To

The Manager

Arkansas School for the Blind

Little Rock

Ark.

Dear Sir,

Unfortunately I am a Blind boy of nearly 15 years of age. I beg to state that I would like to come over to America for my further studies. I know the following subjects:

English

Mathematics

I can read Braille and can write Braille and I know sighted Typing with touch system. I know contraction and abbreviations. I have colifed from the following Institution -

1. Dadar Blind School for the Blind

2. Emerson Institution for the Blind

Lahore Pakistan

3. St Dunstan's for the War Blinded Dehra dun

India

I have been studying in Dadar Blind School Bombay for nearly four years. I learnt Braille reading and Writing and English. I was sent there by my father when I was only five and a half. I got Blind when I was Four Years old. I lost eyesight with Mumps. I studied in Emerson Institution for the Blind Lahore for one year where I learnt only Mathematics. And little bit of my Country Language. Then I was sent over to St Dunstan's for the War Blinded. As this Institution was only meant for War Blind Soldiers then even as I was Civilian I had to come across many difficulties before I could get myself admitted in St Dunstan's. I was taken there as

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ordinary case. I stayed there for only one year but I must confess that I must cry good-byes in St. Dunstan's I stayed in St. Dunstan's Hostel for eight months and rest with my relation. I am herewith enclosing a copy of Certificate from St. Dunstan's from which I think that you will be able to judge that what is my position at present. St. Dunstan is the biggest institution going in India. And there is no more scope in India for my studies as I have gained from St. Dunstan's what they could teach me. However, I have decided that if you could send me your Application Form & Prospectus. Anyhow I would like to pose your form & Prospectus even if you do not think of it. However, it is that with which you would like to know some more. A matter has been already been examined by the school. I would like to complete your full course. I am very with the English Purification. I hope you will appreciate it. Do you have any enquiries?

I do hope to get a reply in affirmative.

An early reply is requested.

Thank you

Yours faithfully
S/O Dr A R M Hta
Deputy Director of Health Services
Erneston (Upper Fife)
Sml East
East Punjab
(India)

I wrote the letter with no expectation that this school would respond more favourably than any other. Then in the last week of February I received a letter from them and as usual took it to Sister Numa to read.

February 16, 1941

Mr V P M Hta
c/o Dr A R M Hta
Deputy Director of Health Services
Erneston
Sml-East
East Punjab, India

'YES'

Dear Mr Mehta

I have your letter of January 31 in which you state you would like to attend the Arkansas School for the Blind

In reply I will say that we shall be happy to have you if details can be arranged By this I mean, entrance into the United States, which I presume can be arranged on a student basis financial details length of time you will want to stay course or courses you will want to pursue and perhaps other details

The usual fee charged for out of state pupils is \$600 00 per school year of nine months I am not sure that \$600 00 would be the fee charged you but certainly no more than that

We offer an academic course which prepares you for University entrance This consists of the usual courses offered in most American public schools In addition we offer broad courses in music, many vocations and athletics

I am not enclosing an application form but will send one later if you are still interested We are sending you a Braille copy of the Arkansas Braille News so that you may read for yourself something of our educational programme here.

May we hear from you again if you are still interested in our school

Sincerely yours

J M Woolly Superintendent

JMW/lh

I was ecstatic I could scarcely believe sister Nimi's voice
They would be happy to have me

She read it fast and then re read it There was no doubt of its contents Had it not been that every letter before this had refused me perhaps I would have run to my mother and cried jubilantly that finally I was going to America and asked her blessings But disappointment after disappointment had made me wary

Tell me something about the school she said

I don't know anything about it There was a pause a pause long enough to sober me

I think you better keep this letter and show it only to Dad dyji she said in an expressionless voice

So it was that in the evening before handing the letter to my father, I told him, I know absolutely nothing about the

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school. Heretofore I had not taken any letter to him that was not written by a great and famous school like Perkins or Worcester College or a printing house like the National Institute. All my other correspondence with less known schools I considered too unimportant to trouble him with. The contents of those letters which indeed varied little from one to the next remained between sister Nima and myself.

That's encouraging all right, he began. He said it with perfect composure with no sign of any particular feelings.

I sent the same hesitation that I had imagined he would feel at sending me to a school ten thousand miles away where for all we knew might be no more than two classrooms.

It could you know, he said, be a school for Negroes. Anyway I shall follow this lead though and write to Mr. Wood but I want you in advance not to bank too much on this.

For three more weeks a childish but quiet hope lingered and I fantasized sometime that maybe all was not over. As May came and passed however and then April I resolved to let about it completely for so word had come from Mr. Wood no indeed had the *Akka Balle News* arrived.

Then finally late April I received the *Baille News* stating that although a hothead than with a very great expectation but still a man and leader of their social adjustment program which made blind people independent able to about the themselves and read something about curriculum my hope was assured though it was a cautious hope for I didn't wish to be disappointed again. I waited somewhat expectant mood until the middle of May when father brought home a letter informing him that I was admitted at Arkas School for the Blind.

Are you going to send me the ?

That depends. Anyway this letter can be used to get your name and address. After you are once in the United States if you find that Arkas School is not suited to you you can always change.

I could tell by his warm voice in spite of its caution that he might never really attend Arkas School that he was happy.

for me Yet I felt a certain remorse, for I was going to America over the protest of all educational authorities, and against the opinion of all my relatives Suppose I had been wrong all this time and I were to fail, what then? Would I be able to bear the disappointment?

Such was the paradox of my reaction that I could see nothing but utter disaster ahead Perhaps I had waited so long it seemed an anti climax I wanted to discuss these anxieties with someone, someone who could understand all my contradictory sensations My father was the one person who had seen what my struggle meant to me, and when he told me that he had decided to take his accumulated leave before retirement and journey with me as far as Britain where he had some special business and perhaps as far as America if dollars could be obtained I felt very much relieved During the long sea voyage I would be able to discuss my fears with him and seek his guidance

With this security in mind I gave myself over to the enthusiastic preparations of the family Mother in particular The state of my clothes always her preoccupation and my annoyance, was now to be remedied, for she could at last convince me to adopt her standards All my sisters fell into a fever of knitting, as each was determined to present me with a sweater before I left sister Nimi wanted to take me to a record shop where I could choose music to remind me of home Ashok began to paint me a picture

The confusion and excitement left me in complete indecision as to where to begin But that problem was soon settled Preparation went on but I lay in bed suffering from the effects of half a dozen inoculations

One day when all the arrangements for my father and me to sail together for England had been made passports and visas secured Father returned home to say that his leave had been cancelled He had been promoted to Deputy Director General of Health Services in the Federal Government and had been asked to stay on for another year because he was indispensable

He said My first duty is to the nation then to my family He added in the same breath however It isn't all altruism If you are going to America I must continue earning If you can wait another year I will take you Otherwise you will have to go alone It is all up to you

I will go alone now I returned and for all my eagerness the word alone jarred

My father took me at my word and since ship companies would not take me on by myself it took as much money as two sea passages to get in accommodations on the plane Through one of our relatives we heard that a certain *pa d* preferred the date of 14 August for my departure to any other and I being indifferent agreed to go then although I was sorry to miss on the day following the celebration of the second anniversary of India's independence.

One important detail still remained to be settled The *pa d*'s decision was going to put me in the United States a month before the opening of my school What was I to do in that time? I wanted of course to see the country and meet people but going alone with meagre command of the English language and without an introduction to a single American hardly seemed feasible I began to flounder Father encouraged me

You can take a taxi to a small hotel in New York and you will meet lots of people right away because America is the friendliest country in the world Even the taxi driver will become your friend

Despite the comforting words I knew he was really worried about me He wrote to one of his old friends in the United States who lived in Ohio asking if he knew any family in New York who could take me on as a paying guest The friend responded by saying that a distant relative of his in New York had married a blind musician and that he had talked to the D Franco who would be glad to have me as a paying guest for fifteen dollars a week Everything was perfect

My father's new job required a move to New Delhi so the preparations for my departure were interrupted while we packed our meagre belongings

I did not really feel I was going until three days before my flight when I had an interview with Pandit Nehru. I was the first blind boy, it seemed who had ever left home to go to America. Panditji therefore wanted to see me.

It was a hot and sultry August day in New Delhi and I felt uncomfortable in my new long pants and oversized coat. My interview with Pandit Nehru was still a few minutes away and to pass the time we rode around the streets which were unusually quiet for India. Father was driving the car and brother Om was sitting beside me opening and shutting the camera nervously. I consulted my Braille watch again and again and the hands seemed to move at once too fast and too slow.

I just hope, Om said when I take your picture with Pandit Nehru my hands are steady. Otherwise it will come out blurred.

We finally pulled up at the house of the Prime Minister of new free India. I took my father's large hand and with brother Om carrying my typewriter, the *Arkansas Braille News* and his camera, we went in.

Do you think Daddyji that Pandit Nehru will ever remember this visit?

I think he will, he said but I wondered. I was one fifteen year old boy out of a mass of three hundred and fifty million people to whom Panditji was both servant and lord.

I hope he'll let me take pictures, brother Om said.

I opened my typewriter, inserted a page and prepared to type and read Braille for Panditji to show him how well equipped I was for going to America. I thought about finding a passage in the Arkansas school paper which I knew especially well so that I would not falter when asked to read but that seemed dishonest.

Just then Panditji walked in. His step seemed to me gentle but firm just as I had imagined it. Instantaneously all three of us stood up. Father putting his arm round my waist said: This is my blind son of whom I spoke to you, Panditji, and after brother Om was presented we all sat down.

Many a time I had heard the voice of the Prime Minister.

3

AMERICA & LIBERATION

The Centre of the Universe

I WAS in the States. In my imagination the land appeared as boundless as infinite as the oceans themselves and I longed for an impression, any impression, which in years to come I should be able to remember. At home one could hardly go half a mile straight — there were curves, turns, alleys and back streets, and with the windows of the car rolled down you could hear the rhythmic tread of a horse harnessed to a *tonga*, the occasional cracking of the whip of the *tonga* man as he tried to get his clients quickly to their destinations. There were the tinkling bells of the bicycles and the curses of the ever present bicycle riders, who swore at the *tonga* men for blocking their way and the sepoys who cursed the bicycle men for cursing and blew whistles at the *tonga* men at every corner for going so fast. Yes, the streets I remembered in India were streets of unmistakable life with colourful sounds and profane language with bends and turns. But the street that I was now riding on seemed to stretch before me wide and straight, and it was quiet. The taxi driver had not yet used his horn and carried on no conversations with his fellow drivers. In these streets I thought you could travel fast and you could always get places, and smoothly, too.

On my right in the back seat sat Mrs DeFranco saying, 'Oh, you simply had a dreadful trip, poor boy. What a terrible way to arrive.'

I didn't mind it, I said.

'Oh, but just imagine having all the contents of your bags stolen.'

'I have two bags, Mrs DeFranco,' I said, 'and one of them is still full.'

I know, but what a bad introduction to America. She took both my hands in hers. Then suddenly she broke into laughter.

THE CENTRE OF THE UNIVERSE

The centre of the universe, that's where I was, I thought, a centre of the universe without the circumference which I'd always imagined the universe to have. In India the universe was an endless circle and there it was a horizontal line. I wanted to tell this to my two companions, but I did not know how to begin or how I could make it clear to them.

In India my life had been routine, a circle of routine from which there was no escape. It was like being on a merry-go-round always in the midst of colourful things but nevertheless circumscribed by the monotonous movement of the merry-go-round. Being in America seemed like being on a swift train, and the life was full, indeed bursting with incidents like your bag being broken into.

It was too early to tell which of the two I preferred.

How was your plane ride otherwise, sir? asked the inquisitive driver.

Yes. Mrs DeFranco said tell us about it. It must have been very exciting indeed.

I wondered what I could tell them. Could I tell them what my father had said just before I boarded the plane?

You will have to learn not to be so shy and sensitive, he had said. You'll have to become thick-skinned.

And my sister Umi had remarked in her usually light manner, Daddy, you certainly can't expect him to be thick-skinned when he only weighs six and a half stone.

What do you mean? I had retorted. I'm almost five foot five.

Sister Nimi had tried to console me by saying. He looks like a man. What are you saying, Umi?

Sitting in the airplane I had tried very hard to put this conversation from my mind. I said to myself that I was a man. After all, I was almost fifteen and a half and with my overcoat on, no one could tell how slender my boyish body was. That was another of the phrases sister Umi used when she talked about me, and however much I tried to console myself still the phrase had caught like a thorn in my mind. That first night on the plane I slept a little while only to dream of a full-sized

mirror. For the first time I was seeing my reflection in the mirror and I was beating it saying: I am a man, not a boy, a man.

I jolted awake, breathing hard. I supposed it was morning although inside the plane it was hard to tell. I'd never been closeted like that before and the senses of sound, smell and even touch were dulled by the incessant roar of the machine so that to a blind man night and day merged into one. I surmised it was morning because shortly the air hostess gently tapped my shoulder and said: "Service for breakfast now?"

My first inclination was to say yes because my stomach did feel empty but in a moment I remembered that my father wasn't there and how would I eat breakfast? All my life I'd eaten with my hands. A spoon was the only implement I had ever used, and that very rarely. A week before leaving home my father had tried to give me quick lessons in eating with a knife and fork, but I felt clumsy with them and I would have tried to read Braille with glasses on. The hostess required to cut the meat from the bone of a lamb chop, frustrated and infuriating for me.

Not yet, I said to the hostess, but I should like some orange juice.

That morning I felt more keenly than ever the need of that support I had left behind me. I had postponed leaving home to eat with a knife and fork, the hope that I would learn it from my father in the way. Then my father had not been able to come with me.

Are you a diet? the hostess asked me once.

No, I said. I am just trying to follow Gandhi's.

Ah, he said, but he fasted for twenty-one days and I understand he didn't even drink orange juice.

I too may have to, I said and although I said this with a forced smile I took my word more seriously than did the ironic hostess.

Please don't go on a hunger strike, sir, she said, against our airline.

It's not the airline, I said, biting my tongue, but there are some religious reasons. And by this statement I knew I had

raised myself in her estimation for when we stopped in Brussels she had special flasks of orange juice ordered for me, and I had an ample supply to last me across the Atlantic

More than once I wished that Mother had let me carry the chocolates in my handbag rather than stuffing them into a laundry bag along with socks and underwear and then sewing it to my overcoat. You can carry more with you like this she said for they won't weigh your overcoat

Often I was on the verge of asking the hostess to bring me my overcoat, but the fear of being shamed because of the laundry bag kept my mouth shut and my stomach empty. I tried to minimize the sensation of hunger as much as possible by blowing up my stomach with frequent glasses of orange juice. The more I thought about the predicament of the knife and fork which the sensation of hunger never let me forget and the more I reflected upon my puny size the more gloomy I became. I despaired at how long I could keep up the pretence and my pride.

I was about to phrase a sentence including the words pretence and pride describing my trip for the benefit of my two companions in the taxi when Mrs DeFranco gently pressed my hand and said: Poor boy, you still have difficulty with the language, don't you?

Yes it is a language difficulty I said belatedly.

The driver remarked, Sure enough I have difficulty speaking English. I could never learn to speak Hindu

Hindi, you mean, I corrected.

You see?' he said with another jolly laugh. Mrs DeFranco and I joined him, and laughing we turned on to Broadway.

Ved we'll soon be home, Mrs DeFranco told me and then you and my husband can have great fun together. I know you will have a lot in common. He was blind and I was blind and she thought therefore, that we would of course enjoy one another's company.

Here we are the driver said, coming to a stop and I hastily pulled out the two dollars an American friend of my mother had given her and handed it to the driver.

THE CENTRE OF THE UNIVERSE

He laughed You were delayed so long that I started preparing your dinner

Oh you cook? I asked unable to contain the astonishment I felt

Sometimes he remarked casually, I help Muriel He started apologizing for not coming to the airport Your arrival time coincided with the lesson of one of my pupils

'Don't mention it, I said

Besides he continued, I knew you wouldn't mind being greeted first by a charming lady

We had a delightful ride from the airport I said

His pacing up and down the living room was distracting for his footfalls were heavy on the floor

Mrs DeFranco asked from the kitchen if I ate meat

I do I said I had been about to say no for I did not welcome the ordeal of cutting it, but my hunger got the best of my shame

She sighed with relief John and I have been playing guessing games about it

I promised my mother I would gain some weight and my father that I would eat any and everything in America

Even beef? she asked in astonishment and I mechanically recited the sentence from my grammar book When in Rome do as the Romans do

Then Mrs DeFranco served the dinner and while she was filling our glasses she casually remarked The peas are at twelve o'clock, the meat balls at six and spaghetti is in the middle

Do you understand that code? asked Mr DeFranco

No I said

We use the clock dial to locate the food on the plate

It is an ingenious way of doing it Mrs DeFranco remarked and you would hardly find any blind in America who would not understand it I was sure that blind everywhere knew it

Darling you forget Mr DeFranco interrupted that India has many primitive conditions and without a doubt work for the blind there is very backward

There is nothing in India I snapped primitive or backward

The quiet sound of Mr DeFranco drinking his water stopped and after a pause he said I didn't mean it that way

I'm sorry I said I sting my water to drink We began to eat

I was glad that meat balls did not need to be cut and during Mrs DeFranco's trips to the kitchen I took my largest bites of spaghetti The stubborn peas which kept sliding off the plate, and my constant wishing Mr DeFranco a way in the kitchen prevented the conversation at the table from being more than desultory

My fast which had lasted forty-eight hours from India to America had left me weak and dizzy but the absence of the vigilant and line hostess and the frequent runs to the kitchen by Mrs DeFranco finally permitted me to fill myself comfortably so that I was ready after dinner to explore the lives of my new acquaintances On we had finished our apple pie and settled into easy-chairs I asked Mr DeFranco if he would tell me about himself

Myself he began is simple and rather unromantic

Oh I predicted you a cabing mode

No he said in a matter-of-fact way I spent twelve years at Perkins Institute for the Blind I entered when I was six left when I was eighteen After some college work I came to New York started singing music lessons and appearing on radio now and the to sing married Muriel and here I am

As he spoke I predicted to myself how similar a life to his might have had Dr Haldar had tried to get me to Perkins as early as my seventh birthday I might very well have studied music the same and then like Mr DeFranco settled in New York as an accomplished musician to live by my talents But marriage?

As it was he had education grace and independence and I had none of these

How was your life at Perkins? I asked suppressing the awe and envy I felt for him

Not too different from that of millions of other kids he said

matter-of factly It was normal and uneventful We played and studied like all other children

What was it really like? I persisted

A great deal of fun, he added absently Fun, that's what it was

I projected into the word fun all the imagined qualities that I attributed to his life But I did not want him to say any more about his life at Perkins, because I had a vague feeling he might spoil it for me

Now that you know all about me he said, tell me about yourself

'Yes, do, Mrs DeFranco added We have heard so much about India It must be a very exciting place

While I was silently wondering whether my hosts would be interested in the Panditji, my music teacher the division of India or Ram Saran's comment on Partition — it was all in the cards — Mrs DeFranco asked if I would mind very much if she finished the dishes

'Not at all I said I am rather tired now but perhaps some day we can have a long talk about my past in India

Soon, I hope, she said touching me on my knee and added with a smile which I could hear Don't worry your English will improve very rapidly And then in a moment from the kitchen I could hear the plates clattering as Mrs DeFranco washed them swiftly

No matter how tired I felt I knew I could not go to sleep until I had the answer to one more question from Mr DeFranco How did you happen to get married like this? I asked bluntly

What do you mean? he said laughingly

'I mean how did it come about? How did you meet her?

'Very simple he said When I came to New York she was living in the same apartment house that I was We met at the door coming and going I asked her out one night and we came to know each other better, and there you are

Just like that? I asked for my curiosity was barely whetted

Of course he said

Incredible, I could not resist adding

Only a week before coming to the States I had sat with my father in New Delhi and we had talked about marriage. His manner was candid, his tone serious and compassionate.

You are old enough so that whether you want it or not you will think about marriage. You will of course not get married for some year, but you will start thinking about it.

I won't, I said determinedly.

Don't be shy — it's biological. I wanted to talk with you about this now, as I don't know how long you will be away from home or when I will see you again.

I waited all the time thinking about the sea voyage we had planned together. I was sad for him and for me, because the views which he might have imparted to me in two or three weeks had now to be squeezed into the drab hours late in the night.

My thoughts were wandering, he said fumbling for words. You think you might marry a Westerner? he asked dryly.

Of course not! I said emphatically, overcoming the initial shock of the question.

I have seen a lot of Anglo-Indians, he continued the pace of his speech in raising Anglo-Indians who are fathered by some names, Englishmen, and have for their mother some poor Indian. You know what their condition is like?

But he did not pause for an answer.

They are ashamed of their mothers because they are black women. These so-called Anglo-Indian children consider themselves white and appeal to their Indian mother. They have the audacity to speak of England as home. They speak of a country they will never see as their home. Home indeed! he said contemptuously.

The truth is they have no home, no land they can call their own, no father who will win them and no mother whom they will respect. I — I would remain a bachelor before I would father such a lot. He added reflectively. In India at least.

It hurt me to say this, he continued with his voice returning to its normal pitch, because the irony in that I believe in one

world and I have never believed in the nonsense of superiority of nationalities and races

There was a calm a fertile moment of communication which I did not choose to break with any response

Remember, he went on slowly I am speaking of the most degenerate of the Anglo Indians They are to be pitied rather than condemned, and again do not forget there are exceptions upon exceptions who do become assimilated into our society

There is more than a mere connexion between what I have been saying about the Anglo Indians and what everyone has been saying about your becoming a misfit in both India and America because of your leaving home so young Fifteen is a young, a very young age to be going away

He paused and the straining silence was enough to emphasize the danger and gravity of the situation

Marriage, he began again is I believe crucial to a full and rich life, and perhaps even more so in your case I am fifty five - an old age for India and then slowly he repeated a very old age So far you have lived through the eyes of our family But your leaving home now, my death and the marriage of your sisters and brothers will change it all Neither your mother and father nor your sisters and brothers can be there all your life to help you live it fully

I can never hope to marry you in India well I am going to be cruel and realistic To marry you in India would be like trying to marry your sister without her face I bring this terrifying image to mind because I want you to understand fully how important people think eyes are in any kind of sexual relationship Men and women fall in love and make love with their eyes Again the irony is that I don't believe that blindness cripples a man sexually and I think there exists no psychological evidence for it but you don't read psychological text books to people when you are asking them to give their girl in marriage

Oh you could get married in India all right, but not well not happily, because the kind of girl you would want could not

be found here. Once you have seen the other side of the coin I mean a Western marriage you will want a life companion equal to yourself.

India is a harsh land. Marriage here is like a business transaction and people weigh and measure their liabilities and assets carefully. In the States no doubt your blindness would make marriage difficult though I believe not impossible because there values are different and marriage is made by the two people involved without the agency of parents. But all this you will find out only by living there.

One more thing I would have you remember. In the melting pot of America the problem of the Anglo-Indian does not exist, but here it does. At the same time your duty and service will never cease calling you back to India where your roots lie deep.

The lonely image of my sister without her face was with me during the dinner and while Mr DeFranco and I sat in the easy chair.

There must be more. I stupidly insisted. Mr DeFranco laughed and said. There is really nothing more. Except he added. us alone of the couple where they lived happily ever after.

Miss DeFranco came in from the kitchen and said to her husband. Perhaps dear you could show him the apartment and the bath while I make his bed on the studio couch.

So Mr DeFranco took me around his two-room apartment with the adjoining kitchen and bath, casually putting my hand on the screen separating the living room from their bedroom, over the double bed his wrung-dead the radio-phonograph combination in the living room, and then the bathtub and the refrigerator. The apartment seemed to me small in fact crowded, with barely enough space between the dining room table and the radio-phonograph to allow one to pass through to the kitchen.

Mr DeFranco said how ever. It is a very comfortable apartment for both of us and we are very happy in it.

My small studio-couch bed was made and after formally saying good night to my hosts I climbed into it. I am not going

THE CENTRE OF THE UNIVERSE

to think about anything, I thought, nothing not even the empty, hollow feeling You can at least think about the air hostess Why can't you think about your mother? She didn't give you a lecture before you left home

Mrs DeFranco returned once more from behind the screen of their bedroom and quietly whispered her breath warm I don't know whether you have refrigerators in India or not but I didn't want you to worry at the noise of ours The motor of our refrigerator makes dreadful sounds all through the night I hope you don't mind

Not at all Mrs DeFranco, I said, turning my face up to her

Oh, she said, I meant to tell you Call me Muriel and my husband John

Of course, I barely said Good night Muriel

Sweet dreams, she lightly said as she walked away behind the screen

Wake up Bells in Arkansas

I PASSED my two weeks with the DeFrancos happily and then the time came for them to leave for their summer holidays in Maine. They invited me to go with them.

August days are the most glorious days in Maine, they said. And Muriel remarked, Even if you don't see the beauty you feel it in your bones.

Every time, John said, I get into the boat, lower the line into the water and feel the weight of the string on the rod, then and then only I feel I'm really alive. You like to swim? he asked abruptly.

I don't know how, I said.

We will teach you, Muriel said.

Yes, and there is nothing like feeling the water against your body, John said.

You are afraid of the water, are you? Muriel asked.

Not at all, I replied. I have been in swimming pools a number of times, but no one would teach me to swim in India, because they thought I might hit my head against the pool wall.

Rubbish! John napped. You can feel the wall of a pool approaching with your facial vision as easily as you can sense any other object.

But anyway, Muriel interrupted, in Maine we won't be swimming in pools.

I noticed that John and Muriel talked about Maine as I might have talked about my bicycle in Rawalpindi. They might even have bicycles in Maine, I thought, and vast stretches of land for riding.

On our way up to Maine, if you wish, we can stop in Watertown and you can talk to Farrell about going to Perkins, rather than to that miserable, wretched place in Arkansas, John said.

WAKE-UP BELLS IN ARKANSAS

'I don't want you to go to the South. Besides, that's no place to learn English. I just can't imagine how your parents thought of sending you to Arkansas. Why, it's a state school. You'll be the only one paying for board and tuition. Now that you are here I am certain Farrell will let you attend Perkins.'

That day one of Muriel's friends visited her and told us they were having a serious polio epidemic in Arkansas. For my benefit Muriel's friend explained. Polio is quite a common disease in America, especially in the summer. Muscles of your body get paralysed and sometimes you can never walk again and sometimes you die. One of my friends had polio. I was already feeling numb, for Muriel's friend was gifted with unusual imaginative powers. I decided I would not go to Arkansas after all.

But when I called Mr Woolly on long distance that evening he said, 'Son, we're anxiously waiting for you. Don't stay in New York any longer. The school starts in another two weeks and you should come out early to get used to our set up. What, you're afraid of polio? Fear more than anything else brings it about,' he said, laughing. 'Son, when should I expect you?'

I would go to Arkansas. After all, Mr Woolly had been the only one to invite me to America.

There was a fence, a very high fence higher than anything one could imagine. There were sheep and sheep and more sheep and they were lined up in an endless line. One sheep jumped the fence and there went another and yet another and another still. The fence was getting higher but the sheep were jumping higher.

And now I myself was a sheep and the one on my right was whispering in my ear. 'You'll never make it. I tell you, you'll never make it.' and I could feel all the eyes of the sheep watching me.

He's frightened, one yelled and another said. 'Incarnated humans make bad sheep' and they all laughed. My muscles hardened and the fence seemed higher than the Himalayan Mountains themselves. The sheep on my left said, 'You can make it. Thank the Lord you can't see, because that way

WAKE UP BELLS IN ARKANSAS

was this school to which I had travelled ten thousand miles? I would write home tomorrow and tell them about it and I tried to recollect the clear visual image which I had painstakingly acquired of the building while going around with Mr Woolly that morning. None of the other students had as yet arrived.

The building was utilitarian and symmetrical and not hard to visualize. One side of the building was reserved for the girls and the other for the boys. In the centre of the main floor was a small corridor off which were six classrooms each with a capacity for ten to fifteen students, one auditorium and a two-room office where the superintendent, the principal and the bookkeeper had their desks.

On the second floor above the corridor was a small library and music conservatory separating the girls' sleeping accommodations from the boys', and below the corridor in the basement, adjoining the kitchen and a few other classrooms, were two dining rooms, one for the students and the other for the faculty members.

Like the girls' the boys' dormitories were partitioned into three sections: one for the small boys, that is under ten; another for the boys ranging in age from ten to fourteen; and then there was the section for the older boys in which I was placed. Allotted to me was a small locker, about six feet tall and two feet wide, in a long room with twenty-nine similar lockers arranged in a double row with two sinks at the end. I was assigned a bed in the sleeping hall upstairs, a room holding thirty such beds with hardly more than a foot of space separating one bed from the next. Along with the older boys I would also have the use of a small lounge off the locker room. Scattered between various sections of dormitories for older and younger boys and girls were small rooms for the faculty members.

The architect had conceived and executed the buildings so capably that the entire student body, ranging in age from five to thirty and comprising in number a little over one hundred, along with a dozen and a half faculty members, including the superintendent and the principal, not to mention the maintenance help, could be accommodated in a building.

three times the size of the cramped Dadar School for the Blind in Bombay or my home in Lahore. The architect must have miscalculated slightly however for there were three small cottage like projections at the back of the building. One of these was an industrial shop for teaching the students carpentry and chair caning, another was a gymnasium which served a dual function - it was a place for calisthenics and wrestling matches and was also used for Saturday night dances and the last projection absorbed the overflow of the girls from the main building.

The corridor containing the main classrooms had on the boys side a attachment which obviously had not been part of the original plan and had been added only that summer. Behind a clumsily built freshly painted counter there was a small refrigerator holding bottles of soft drinks with a chocolate case at its side and I was told that high school seniors were to maintain this concern.

Lying in my bed I surveyed the building as I had gone over the room by room that morning. Each time I reconstructed the building in my imagination it seemed smaller and smaller and I wondered how this empty building would feel once the one hundred students returned to the school and life was restored to the empty halls. Even in my bedroom the farthest extremity of the building with my door but I could hear the disquieting sound of the freezer motor and I also remembered hearing the bookkeeper's typewriter thumping in my locker room. It would not be at all impossible I thought to hear in the boys lounge girls conversing at the other end of the building.

But there would be two weeks before any students would return. Why had I been dreaming of Abdul? Were there to be Abdul's harassments here also? But I was big now twice no maybe three times the size I had been in the Dadar School and I was sleeping in the older boys dormitory. The freezer motor had stopped running. I knew it would start back again as it always did and I listened. Everything was absolutely still.

At the head of my bed there was a window but nothing rustled outside. The air was still in that hot August night, and

WAKE UP BELLS IN ARKANSAS

the building seemed hollow and deserted I could not bear the silence All of a sudden something started to rattle loudly I was paralysed with fright, for the sound was threatening and it seemed to fill the whole building I jumped out of my bed and ran down the stairs shouting Is anyone here is anyone here? My words echoed from hall to hall Listen what was that sound? Someone was hammering Where? But the sound could not be placed, for it was irregular and reverberating I was shouting frantically Then I heard footsteps starting from the other end of the building, the girls end and shuffling rapidly on the floor I waited, then I heard the muffled voice of an elderly, a very elderly, man call out, Anything the matter?

I did not answer

He stopped right in front of me looking the other way, asking still Where are you? Anything the matter?

Listen I barely articulated and then his body brushed against mine as he swiftly turned about

Oh, there you are, he said, putting his hand on my shoulder What's the matter? Are you homesick? Calm yourself sir

But that sound that sound, can't you hear it? Are you deaf?

Oh, that he said Those are the steam pipes

Steam pipes? I repeated questioningly

Steam pipes with which we heat the building in the winter They were working on them today and they must have left them on or something

I hate it, I said, I hate every bit of it I want to go home

His hand was trembling on my shoulder I heard him gulp loudly Then he said, I am only the night watchman here, can I help you?

Leave me alone! I snapped

Then I heard his retreating footsteps, and I wanted to run after him and tell him I was sorry Old men were always kind and understanding They left you alone when you asked them to - maybe there were other such old men at the school who would put their hand on your shoulder and would not say anything to you that embarrassed you

I went outside and sat down on the ledge next to the side door. When my heart returned to its normal tempo and I stopped feeling it was going to leap out of me I decided to do some exploring. I wanted to see what else there was besides the building and I started walking around. First I started circling the main building. I told myself I could do it in ten minutes if I walked fast. There were many grass patches around the building which I had not encountered that morning. Later that night I also found behind the tag-s which seemed to be a large wooded area I walked a little way in the woods and found the ground to be rough and piled up with a few inches of thick dry leaves which I kicked under my bare feet. I did not want to go back inside. I found an evergreen street carpeted with leaves and sprawled down mooting the leaves under me.

I slept soundly but when I awoke the morning had set in and it was pleasantly cold. I walked to the front door of the building and found that the man sitting inside the door. As I entered he asked: "Are you feeling better sir?"

"Very well," I said.

He got up and brushed the back of my shirt.

"Promote you tell anyone about—"

"Of course not," he said. "I understand perfectly. Well, it's almost five thirty. He's gone and it's time for me to leave. Will you be all right?"

"Yes," I said confidently and walked through the centre of the corridor to the boys' end of the building.

Everything was strange, strange and incomprehensible. School had been going for some time before I grew accustomed to the routine and all the babble of voices in the locker room, the comments and jokes made in the classroom seemed as irrelevant to my education as the noise of the subway station in New York. With my head bent slightly forward I would carefully listen to the name of the student introduced to me and would try to remember his voice and the shape of his hand. Gradually, almost at a snail's pace, people by the very repetition of their mannerisms and thanks to my growing familiarity with

the English language, began to imprint their personalities upon my mind. To the students I was in the beginning an object of curiosity, but once they found out that I had neither long hair nor a beard, as many Sikhs do, nor any other distinctive characteristic, they accepted me as just another boy. Indeed, after the first week they never asked me any questions about India.

The avalanche of impressions at the beginning of school had so overwhelmed me that my senses had been deadened. Now I became firmly entrenched in the routine, my senses of sound, smell and touch came alive.

It was a Saturday night, and such was the din in the locker room that it was all I could do to stay in it and continue dressing, a boy called Other was jovially whistling as he shaved, the hot water running in a steady stream. Kenneth was desperately trying to get hold of one of the half-sighted fellows to choose a tie for him. Is George in the room? George? Where did Pat go? he was shouting in his high cracking voice. Bill, who had evidently finished dressing, was practising on his clarinet with Max, who had once said, "I can't stand Billy's playing, trying to drown out the music by singing at the top of his lungs."

Big Jim had his shoe propped on the long bench which separated the two rows of lockers, and he was complaining that Joe was not giving him a good enough shine. "What the hell do you expect for a nickel?" Joe retorted loudly, apparently trying to enlist the sympathies of the other students in the locker room.

Joe said Big Jim in an earnest voice: "if that blind Kenneth there isn't able to see his face in the toes of my shoes, I'll beat your brains out, and you'll never be able to think for the rest of your life."

"Can Joe think?" queried a boy in passing.

By now the line had formed behind Other, and a number of voices were prodding him to finish his shave. "You've been shaving for all of ten minutes now."

"Just be grateful you don't have a stubble like mine," Other said.

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But Othe plead d another boy in a more urgent tone
the dance is o ly halt an h r a ay

Pat e a i u Oth t a d but h vas through and
was walk g m ly y f e m th k

I a b i l w t y n g t o r ut ocks f om the bottom of
my lock n i h k aught m ight in my back Imme-
diately Oth r flu g h ba hairy arm arou d my neck and
laugh gly j l k J H t e mell d I an of ha ing soap
and h t ha l w j aw g my new wh e hurt which I
h d ju t f r n H h i l e ru n g the front f my shirt
b r i d d o r v a y h n g b au e I wa ous about the
dance a l l k h wa n y f a o d n g the ordeal I
w al ly g h l y The l n g nar o n oom was hot and
st ff y t b o l h p h t l i h a n d d odorant hair
o l d h b a f m j a p r i a t m o s p h e e which
hung th u m f i n g l y a d the od u got thi ker and
h a h t h t p r n p o g r s d fo the Saturday
n g h t d a

F t Ch r i t d f m the h w a unc ng his pres-
n by th m j n h th w g n g doo loudly i his customary
v a

A h t d O h a n l k n e th both houted to him to
c m j e p h l t h s

A l l l h m t b y h i k n a m i Come here you
O n E l B l l

J e w j g d t l l v Let th poor boy g t h m e l f d r e s s e d
Y u u j l j k A l a t l d H e you e r heard f
b u l l g t g d J Y u d t h a e to how your blindness
so b l y

J m w t l l g u n g w h l o r b t h t m e b o u t the d n c e
What f l a g u j Y h w u p at a y of the
d n c e I t b a y o d o t h a e n o u g h m n e y to buy your
g i r l a C o k t h

O h e r j s l t h t e d f t h l o c k e r n o m B g j m
if you a g e t j e t g t h d a n I l l g i e h m a n c k e l
m a b e a l m w t h w l l b e e n o u g h f o b o t h o f t h m

Oh hell wh t w u l d I d a t t h d a n c e ? J o e s a i d d i s

couraged, and although Big Jim still sneered loudly, Other didn't say anything

Fat Charlie continued dressing and simultaneously walking from locker to locker inspecting the boys' clothes. He was standing next to my locker, tying Kenneth's necktie. I waited. I knew his one eye would scan me next.

You seem set to kill, he said, turning towards me.

I hope not, I answered with an instantaneous smile. He straightened my tie, put a few strands of hair in place on the back of my head with his comb, and with no ceremony was gone. For the first time that evening, all the muscles in my body relaxed. The din and the gaudy smell were transformed into a hilarious gaiety and colourful scent. I felt like a person totally inexperienced, forced to audition and then accepted to play a part which was contrary to his character. To be sure, I was still in the dressing room, but the mere attention of Fat Charlie was as encouraging as the attention of an accomplished actor to the nervous and inexperienced novice. Being fully dressed, I stayed by my locker, anxiously awaiting the dress rehearsal. The boys were gradually filing out of the room, and it was clear they were going to the end of the building for their girlfriends. At last the clock outside struck eight, and I followed the boys who called themselves members of a club with bachelor tendencies, the word tendencies being used, it was explained, to indicate the dynamic, hence changing attitudes of the members.

The walk from the main building to the gymnasium was hardly more than a fraction of a block, and by the time we entered, the music was blaring, and at least half of the high school were gathered in the hall, which was hardly twice the size of our drawing room at home. Having never held a girl or danced a step, I stood back against the wall, listening to the bustling activity on the floor, activity which seemed all the more lively as the room was small and the floor so crowded, even where I stood someone would brush against me now and then. Standing there alone amidst this light-hearted gaiety, I felt exposed to the full view of all, until I reminded myself that

No one stirred, but there was a round of mocking snores

Rise up men, the housemaster would go on The cook is cooking ham and eggs and is going to serve you a large glass of orange juice with pep-up cereal

The ham and eggs brought varied responses Sometimes the lips of high voiced Kenneth smacked and sometimes Chubby Ernie, as everyone called him said in a muffled voice with his head, it seemed buried in his blanket I haven't had ham and eggs for years and I've been at this here school for nine already, nine times longer than you've been And there's nothing but dried up toast and sloppy eggs once in a while for breakfast, and maybe starchy cereal

Ignoring all this, the housemaster would say On your feet March, my Christian soldiers And he would leave with This is the last call to breakfast just as the clock downstairs began to strike six forty five There was always the sound of feet scraping groping for slippers Those few who still slept got the customary treatment from George and Pat There were screams and shouts as the two turned someone's bed over swung it from side to side or propped it precariously on creaking wicker chairs which stood by every bed Some boys were cursing them for tipping them over Others were protesting that they were awake The housemaster was back in the hall scolding George and Pat, inspecting the beds and prodding the boys

Downstairs, two or three people were sharing one sink in the locker room Eight people were crowded into the small cubicle with only three shower spouts Boys half awake were singing whistling splashing water running from locker to sink and back to their lockers The housemaster had come down by now and standing in the half ajar locker room door, called

Three minutes to line up two minutes and fifty eight seconds to line up and so on As the clock struck seven fifteen there was a rush at the locker room door everyone hustling to be marshalled into line in whatever state of dress provided of course that by the time we reached the door of the dining room our shirts were buttoned and our pants zipped Grace pronounced, we would take our assigned places at tables seating six

but I wanted to have that illusion if only for a moment to find out where and how I fitted into the social crossword puzzle

There were more bells, bells beckoning to gymnasium classes I went down to the damp and murky gym grabbed a suit from a pile of gym clothes and hastily putting it on ran upstairs There were sounds of boys punching the punching bag and the unbearable smell of sweating bodies on the worn-out mats The teacher blew the whistle went around the small wooden floor placing everyone in position on the mats and a session of calisthenics began with his rasping voice calling the numbers We instantaneously responded by bending our bodies, stretching our muscles and hopping to the drone of his voice

I dreaded making mistakes because I never liked the bending body of my gym teacher, his naked and bulging stomach greasy with perspiration — the body which would crawl all over me trying to show me how to hold my ankles as I swayed from side to side or how to touch my toes without bending my knees

After the calisthenics we returned to the dressing room once more with three or four trickling shower spouts for all the boys and then we were marched off to the dining room for dinner, where two sighted teachers continuously kept their watchful eyes on the dining table etiquette of the students Ever since Miss Harper had taught me how to find the end of a piece of meat with my fork and then saw it off with my knife or how to find the bone of a pork chop to cut it out I could manipulate these implements with a great deal of facility and I did not have to go hungry any more

After dinner there was a study hall and all the students in the upper grades were crowded into the small library Then at eight o'clock there was another session of gymnastics, and finally an hour free just before bedtime The housemaster whom every student mimicked effectively put us to bed just as he got us out of bed He would wander in and say haltingly Cens' nighty nighty You are all old and wise men and know the rules that all must be asleep firs asleep by ten thirty But we were neither old nor wise and it was some time before all were asleep

horses you had to justify your worth and existence to the horses. You had, somehow, to prove to them that you could carry as much weight as they could, and if you couldn't move as fast, you at least were willing to work harder and put in longer hours.

Anything you do wrong in the world of the seeing, Mr Chiles had said, like dressing untidily or putting your elbows on the table while eating even if half the sighted world themselves commit the same sins people around you will chalk it up to your blindness. They'll call you poor wretches feel sorry for you, and they will commit the worst sin of all by excusing it because you're blind.

So we were marshalled in groups and marched into classes where we were given good common sense lessons — that you had to introduce young to old rather than vice versa that it was as good to avoid wearing brown and blue together even if you did not know what brown or blue signified and that if you could not eat an orange half with a spoon it was better not to eat oranges at all. At the same time we were told that no matter how independent blind people became they must always accept help from the sighted graciously recognizing that the feeling for helping the blind was the result of a generous impulse.

When Ernest asked: If you went to a restaurant and they served you oranges in halves and you couldn't eat them and the waitress offered to feed you should you accept the help? he was abruptly told not to make light of serious matters.

As part of the social adjustment programme, we also had personal private conferences with the faculty, who pointed to individual defects which they did not care to criticize in public. Ernest told us that his adviser suggested that he wash his feet more often. Joe reported that he was to start using a deodorant. Kenneth said he got a lecture to keep his mouth closed at least some of the time.

No blind person should be caught dead petting in public and one teacher went so far as to say that it might be better to avoid kissing your wife or husband in public just in case

might be a misunderstanding. We were carefully examined on this material in written tests and it was a tribute to the teachers that no one failed.

The more serious side of the social adjustment programme was concerned with facial vision and the teaching of mobility. One day early in spring all the totally blind students were herded into the gymnasium and asked to run through an obstacle course. Plastic and wooden slabs of all sizes and weights were suspended from the ceiling around the gymnasium. Some of them hung as low as the waist, others barely came down to the forehead. These slabs were rated at varying speeds and the blind were asked to walk through the labyrinth at as great a speed as possible without bumping into the obstacles. The purpose of keeping the slabs moving was to prevent the students from getting accustomed to their position and to force them to strain every perceptible ability to sense the presence of the obstacles. The thinner the slab and the higher its position the harder it was to feel. In effect — that is to say to sense the pressure of the object against the skin — a pressure felt by the myriad of pores below and next to the ear. Some of the slabs were faintly marked like the slimmest solitary lamp-post on a street corner. The obstacle course helped gauge how well an individual could distinguish. I had mass from another and having located the obstacle sought to have it circumvented without running into it yet again. Here was where the wheat was separated from the chaff.

A person who has looked about fearlessly — and it is a help if he was blinded in his childhood — will do much better in this test of facial vision than a blind individual who rather lost his sight late in life has been retrained from depending on the full range of his coordinated senses. Having of course during my childhood jumped from banister to banister from roof to roof and ridden my bicycle through familiar places crowded with unlocated objects — and that too at a much faster rate of speed — for me, going through this obstacle course was child's play. The gymnasium was kept quiet so that the blind people could hear the obstacles although I could not help feeling that I could have

run through the labyrinth with a jet buzzing overhead. When someone cracked his head against one of the slabs and the others discovered who had done it, they would laugh mercilessly, until, of course, they themselves ran smack into one.

After we had spent three or four class sessions running through this obstacle course, we were given a theoretical briefing on the importance of facial vision — that the blind ought to put the same emphasis on it as sighted do on seeing and that the way to develop it was through abandonment of fear and through complete relaxation. We were also briefed on a few stock secrets of the trade, such as that the head should always be held high in order to more easily walk a straight line, that some found that a hardly perceptible arching of the back helped to minimize any injuries frontally received and that compass directions — determined sometimes by the sun against the cheek — were better than remembering lefts and rights. In time, he would get the knack of such things as going into unfamiliar stores and finding the right counter or finding an elevator in a strange building.

We were also advised that in crossing streets it was safer to walk with the traffic rather than to follow pedestrians as they might be crossing against the light. In crossing streets without lights, safety depended entirely upon the ingenuity of the blind individual in gauging the distance of the cars correctly although it was helpful in crossing wider streets to take them in parts or in halves. Above all one must never get panicky and run across a street.

Each instructor then was assigned two or three students and with cane in hand but token in pocket, we separated for downtown. My instructor gave me a list of trifling if not embarrassing things to purchase from scattered counters in a Rexall drug store, and then asked me to meet him at the coffee shop of a departmental store for a milk shake the treat being dependent upon my success in making the purchases. I was specifically told not to ask for help and even if it were voluntarily offered I should try to decline provided I could do so gracefully. I did not know whether the instructor would keep his word.

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on me but whether he did or not it was important to me that I should do well on the first day of independence.

I started out by tapping the cane in front of each foot before taking a step as I had been taught. This was supposed to ward off tripping over cracks and dropping into a manhole or meeting some other child but in learning to decline I found that the noise itself made me self-conscious and was quite distracting. So I flung it to the gutter at the end of the driveway in front of the house and having made a mental note of the spot that I might pick up the cane on my return I started walking rapidly toward the bus stop with my hands thrust into my pockets. Rather than wait the leisurely stop I decided I would walk three or four blocks to the next one. Just to test my feeling I started the lamppost and tried to gauge the distance from which I perceived them.

The sun was still in the gloom although there was just the right proportion of breeze to make the heat not severe but pleasant. I felt the breeze as a signal that it disturbed my faith. All around I could perceive the curves and slight jags of the street though that street was totally unfamiliar to me. Here where I unexpectedly stepped off a kerb that felt as if it were the kerb and the street as we fought glacially to the left I had my cane back—that cane which my mother called the third leg of a blind man although Big Jim had remarked that it was more like a displaced tail. I found the path that soon my foot started registering a light against the side of the sidewalk and that was enough. Tomorrow I felt as he felt there was a steady stream of cars going both ways. I guessed about forty miles an hour. The wondrous sound of Ford motor Chivalots and I even remembered a gas-fueled Buick engine. Walking on that street I felt confident and happy. I imagined a driver would feel with a touch of magic with the command of his feet. Then I heard the clanging of a trolley bell. I felt the wire just above the traffic. My intuition halted. I must listen for it as a sign of the approaching trolley roll. Then almost a block behind me I distinguished the sound of the trolley motor from the rest of

the traffic The bus stop was still a block and a half ahead of me and I knew I had to catch that trolley because it would be twenty minutes before the next one With the ever increasing sound of the trolley motor in my ears, I started running as fast as I could to the bus stop I wished there were the shadow of a wall or a fence, to my right, to run by As it was there was empty space to my right and the hindering noise of the traffic to my left, a narrow sidewalk with a string of lamp posts and heaven knew what other hazards I skirted one lamp-post by a hair's breadth, and another actually caught my shoulder, but not my head

When I got to the next intersection the trolley was almost abreast If I waited to listen for the sound of the traffic I could not possibly make it, so I dashed across the street, thinking of what I had repeated to my mother a long time ago

Death comes only once, I had said

But, she had said what if you lose a leg?

That had been frightening all right

After that I wouldn't want to live I don't mind being blind but a wheel chair

Maybe if I had a white cane in my hand I wouldn't have to worry as much about the traffic and the bus driver would know I was blind and would wait for me But it is better this way I thought

Just when I perceived the looming shadow of the bench at the bus stop about ten or fifteen feet away from me the trolley passed me If only someone would be waiting there I wished, so that the trolley will at least stop But no one was and I missed the trolley

With a discouraged heart I slowly walked up to the bench out of breath and sat down It would be twenty minutes more twenty whole long minutes and maybe I wouldn't get my milk shake after all I took out my Braille watch and kept my fingers fixed on the hands and I heard car after car pass by I felt as envious of the drivers inside as a man standing in a rain storm trying to thumb a ride although I myself had no intention of flagging down a car

town, I would get the various stores located by keeping track of how many doors up they were from the street corner. It was as simple as that.

My instructor had said that there were a number of ways of telling when you got to the street corner. It could be done by the noise of the traffic, the draft of air or the receding shadow of the windows. At last I was at the double doors of the department store. I went in and started walking back towards the elevator listening for the sound of its door. Inside the elevator, I found my instructor.

As soon as we sat down in the restaurant he said laughingly, "You shouldn't have asked that man for the shoelace counter."

"And how was I to know where to find it?" I retorted. "By the smell of it?"

"You gave me the slip," he said, "that is, until I saw you running from inside the trolley that you missed. But I picked you up again at the drug store. So he had watched me!"

The first thing he was saying admonishingly was that you've got to admit to yourself that you are blind and that there are certain things you just can't do, like throwing away your cane and crossing streets without listening for traffic.

He was right, of course. I wouldn't make a habit of crossing streets that way, but the cane — that was another matter. I had never hooked a cane in front of my bicycle when I rode it, so I did not see why I had to carry one when walking, if I did not mind taking the chance of falling into a manhole. As for letting drivers know I was blind, I felt safer relying on myself than on their judgement. Maybe it was all rationalization, like that of Benjamin Franklin when he stopped being a vegetarian because he saw a little fish in the open stomach of a big fish about to be cooked.

"You'll carry that cane," my instructor said threateningly. "If not, you won't be allowed to leave campus."

"Yes, sir," I replied.

The milk shake was there now, and putting the straw between my teeth, I let it drain down my throat. It was cool and delicious, and I forgot about the cane. All of a sudden I felt

A DONKEY IN A WORLD OF HORSES

and from my left eye everyone would always know that I was blind

How much can you see? she asked

Just enough to get around I replied That way, I thought, there would be no fuss about her taking me right to the door of the school and helping me in

You know, she said — we had just overtaken the trolley — 'you half sighted people are the link between the world of the blind and the world of the seeing

Yes ma'am I said That was the first time the words half sighted had ever sounded good to me

The blind must have a world all their own don't you think? she asked

It's just a world minus eyes I said It's what one might call a world of four senses instead of five

But you have developed your senses so much more acutely, and to see a blind person get around is so amazing to me until, of course I remind myself that they have extra senses

They don't have any extra senses ma'am I said unless you call facial vision that Sometime try to find a door in the dark and believe me ma'am you'll find even you have some facial vision

They must have extra senses she said emphatically She probably had not even listened to what I had said If you were totally blind you would know what I am talking about

I was too tired to argue and leaning back against the seat, I relaxed while she lectured me about the extra senses of the blind the car all the time moving swiftly through traffic

Bringing the car to a stop she said Here we are I thanked her and got out of the car right in front of the long driveway leading to the school She drove away I found my cane where I had left it It had a spring at the tip so that when you tapped it the cane would automatically spring up I stood there just springing the cane up and down listening to the tapping sound The more I tapped the less I liked it I knew I couldn't get used to it even if I wanted to The spring made it worse rather than better

A DONKEY IN A WORLD OF HORSES

I had been circumscribed in the building compounds like a prisoner whose every friend is a prison mate and whose every impression of the world outside is coloured by day to-day minute observations of the happenings within the walls. For me it was like watching life in the United States with a jaundiced ear. I learned among other things that to be blind was to be jobless because employers did not like hiring blind people especially for temporary work. But the tireless efforts of Mr Woolly finally secured me a job working forty eight hours a week for one hundred dollars a month at an ice-cream plant. Covering each day a distance of about four miles in trolleys and buses while going to and from work hammered home with full force the realization that the world outside by no means accepted the capabilities of the blind at face value, as we had been led to believe by the flawless understanding of the seeing members of our blind society.

I remember going out on crowded buses. To my chagrin ladies would get up and offer indeed force me into their seats, and if I resisted I ran the risk of having everyone in the bus share in the scene, it was awkward and unbearable when often two or three people tried to direct me to my seat which I could have found quite well alone. On my first day the bus had been comparatively empty and I had entered it without anyone's taking notice of my blindness. But now travelling at seven thirty and five the morning and evening rush hours in packed buses with scarcely any room to stand it was hard to move in the crowded aisle without bumping into people and making my blindness apparent.

Even in the restaurants where I used to go during my lunch hour were waitresses who took me for not only blind but deaf and who used to shout the menu attracting some times the attention of the whole restaurant. If I were with someone they would turn to my guide and say "What does he want?" as though I were dumb and incapable of ordering for myself. Sometimes strangers paid my bill probably moved by pity.

When I crossed intersections too which I could have managed

I heard then above the roar of the traffic a clattering noise, beginning a block away Clack clack clack and I could almost forecast the next one. Some blind man was walking on the sidewalk, finding his way with the help of a cane. He must have very bad facial vision. I thought to have to locate every wretched lamp post with a cane. Clack clack clack. I stood there running my hand up and down my new long thin cane with a fancy cap instead of a handle at the top. I took the two ends of the cane in my hands and putting my foot at the centre, pulled hard and broke it in two. And flinging it back into the gutter I walked rapidly towards the school building. I reached the building almost running with clack clack clack still ringing ears.

I took the steps in front of the building two at a time and I the lounge out of breath. As always there was Joe humming a tune.

Who's there? he asked.

It's me. I said. You ought to be able to recognize my steps by now.

I guess so, he said languidly and went back to humming his tune.

I could not shake loose the lonely image of the emptying and to turn follow graduation with a few stragglers here and there talking boisterously as though to remind themselves that the occasion was one not only of solemnity but of happiness. And then one by one the parents whisked away their children for the summer holidays and overnight the school building was empty and its halls as hollow as when I had first arrived there. The cook, the watchman, the bookkeeper and Mr Woolly with his family were the only inhabitants left in that once cramped and crowded building. For me there was no home to go to, no parents to whisk me away. There was only the prospect of an idle and drab summer ahead.

With the setting in of the hot and humid summer I realized how much I had been a captive of my school surroundings. Until the launching of the mobility programme in late spring,

Ozella, Jean and Helen, the girls I worked with, asked, What happened?

Nothing I muttered trying desperately to control the gathering tears, and after washing up I took my place between the long table covered with an aluminium sheet and the large open freezer which sent a draft of cold frosty air tickling the back of my neck. While Ozella sacked the hundreds of Popsicles and Polar Bars which Helen and Jean kept dumping on trays, I boxed them and stacked the cartons one on top of another for Tommy to carry into the cold storage.

I wished Jay would let me wash pans or work the sticking machine but, no, I was blind and Jay didn't want me to leave my place behind the table. If you get hurt he said repeatedly 'the company is liable to sue. But why would I be more likely to get hurt than Ozella Jean Helen Tommy or indeed Jay himself?

Helen, come here and box and please let me work the racks in the freezer, I begged. I can do it. Believe me I can.

Helen did and it felt good pulling out large heavy freezer racks, weighed down with icy Popsicles and hardened Polar Bars and carrying them over to Ozella. It was better than just standing eight hours a day six days a week boxing.

'Be careful Ozella said. The floor is wet.

I couldn't get any more wet than I am now. I said happily. Then I heard the side door swinging and the footsteps of Jay in the large room. He did not say anything but I knew he was watching. I'll show him. I kept thinking as I emptied the racks into Ozella's tray. The manhole incident seemed to fade into the background and even the ladies who got up to give me their hats seemed good natured and well meaning. That was it - one had only to show the sighted people by example what one could do and they would understand. Actions always spoke louder than words ever could.

I hustled to and fro from the freezer to the table. I heard the steady motion of Ozella's arms lifting the ice-cream bar from the tray, putting them into crinkling sacks. They're waiting for me. I thought, all of them every one of them. All of a sudden

You moved your queen right into the range of my bishop so I can take it, Ed said after one of my moves the first time we played

The girl on my left who was watching sighed conspicuously

Oh I said, she's all yours hiding the real remorse I felt at losing the queen so early in the game and forcing a smile as though it were a calculated move

No Ed said take the move back

'Why?' I asked

'You didn't know my bishop was there You didn't see it'

Yes, the watchers chimed in Do let him take the queen

Although I raged within I took my move back because I knew from Ed's tone that no matter how much I persisted he would not relent, and when one is blind one always has to make compromises even if they do leave a bad taste in one's mouth Once during the game he said I'm sorry I didn't mean to move my rook there

A move is a move I replied brutally taking his castle At his next move I was ruthless again and he lost the game

You don't pull any punches he said and I thought I detected a bitter note

I guess not I said feeling sorry and glad at the same time

After that he used to wait for me to make a mistake and every time I did he would break into a hearty laugh exclaiming We got the master that time and there would be applause all around He stopped too trying to protect me in the swimming pool and whenever I did have a rough time I sensed that he watched with a gleeful eye and I was glad that I played chess with him ruthlessly

Once when I got off the bus and was getting ready to cross the very busy street in front of the Boys Club Joe Red who was the director darted across to me from the other side

Am I ever glad that you showed up!

You knew I would I said circularly but why the reception?

Come in and I'll tell you he said and I walked a short

THE STEAMPIPES

I went back to playing but she stopped me again and asked abruptly What is your religion?

I am a Hindu, I suppose, I answered not a little taken aback by the unexpectedness of the question.

What does that mean? she persisted

It is hard to say, I said More than anything it is a way of life.

And while I groped for words she went on, Have you ever known Christianity?

I have known Christians, I began eagerly I went to an American missionary school for the blind in India And then, tentatively, I met Deoji and the nurse there

Who are they? she interrupted

Christians, Indian Christians I said somewhat abashed I knew them well I thought I heard a sniff so I checked myself

I am sorry, she began compassionately that you have never been shown the light — you who should be so sensitive because of your blindness and sufferings I started drumming my fingers idly on the bench You must be baptized or you are damned for ever to hell and fire It is still not too late for you to be saved and I want to help you, Ved Will you let me? she said

My fingers tapped on the bench more nervously

You have to be saved she went on so that you can go on and save others When I asked what saving was she explained rapturously, her speech gaining in tempo, how I had accepted Christ and be prevented from sinning If you were not saved you were damned for ever damned Yes all Hindus and Muslims were damned even if no one had tried to show them the light God always showed light to those whom he wanted to save Did I not understand that he was working through me?

My fingers were making a regular noise now Stop trying that! That noise gets on my nerves

I said and heard the loud sounds of numerous instruments

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th religion which sent *pandits* to my mother to make her atone for my blindness as though she had brought it upon me herself, which made men like Qasim Ali and Ram Saran cut each other's throats and which now enlisted Miss Doves as its agent for my conversion. Conversion from what to what? I wondered. The most appalling thing it seemed to me at that time was that each individual was convinced that he was unerringly right.

Mr Chiles in his class had used the analogy of a circle, trying to explain to Ray how he should regard the various Protestant denominations. It is as though we were all standing in a circle and trying to reach the same centre but taking different paths. Did that analogy hold for various religions?

Ray had not accepted Mr Chiles's analysis. All paths can't be right. Some must be dead wrong, he had said, and yet he was already a preacher in a church.

One afternoon, not too long after that piano lesson, a number of us were gathered around the vending stand drinking cold drinks. Fat Charlie was helping Other carry in some cases of Coke.

God damn it, Charlie said, putting down the case, it snagged my pants.

Sssh. Other shushed. Watch yourself, Bull. Remember, you are among girls.

Charlie cursed some more, definitely but in guarded tones. I doubt if many people heard him. All of a sudden the loud but shaking voice of Miss Doves exclaimed, Charles! and the hubbub subsided as though the boys had been fighting and the commanding voice of Mr Woolly had appeared on the scene.

Charles, you—you promised and just a day ago too, the voice went on despairingly. What am I going to do in this school?

Then I heard the clicking heels of Miss Doves's shoes rapidly shuffling down the hall towards the music conservatory. Everyone remained quiet even after the sound of the entrance door ceased. Then all of a sudden, What happened? What's in here? What did you do, Bull? and

religious work in our school will come to a close now because word about her activities is finally going to reach Mr Woolly

That it certainly will said Ernest

But even Mr Woolly, Other remarked, can't stop secret prayer meetings behind the piano

It was spring now There was the cool smell of sprouting grass and a fragrance of blossoming flowers and the distracting sound of the lawn mower, which streamed into the open windows of the classrooms Except perhaps the classes of Mr Chiles all the other junior high and high school classes came to a halt, as though the temperature outside were touching one hundred and twenty degrees, as in Lahore and it was too hot to study Actually that spring was one of the mildest and what heat there was was generated by politics - school politics

Whether it was because our constitution was new or because politics injected a new issue into the old and worn threadbare topics of conversation at our school students and teachers alike talked and campaigned as though it were a presidential election for the country rather than the measly prospect for a few people of winning honour and perhaps some glory but certainly not much power Whether I went to the locker room lounge or the sleeping hall there were always boys whispering and I always had to clear my throat loudly before entering so that I might not overhear Blind people hate more than anything else being overheard and I knew that well Sometimes I would clear my throat fast enough and embarrassing phrases would fall on my ears Although Kenneth had said You don't go into politics if you don't want your toes stepped on although people were purposely aiming dumbly at me

Aw don't you know that Jane is old enough to marry and the only reason he's going with her is to win the girls' votes? I overheard Billy telling Joe when I was in the lounge You don't want to vote for him

And mild-mannered Joe was awfully sure he didn't know what to do Other and Velma were

And I because I was in the race as well

the housemaster to read it aloud in the lounge, as he did with many of the boys' letters

If you want I said handing over the letter to her hesitantly It was a note from my younger brother Ashok. He had decided not to buy a new pair of shoes for a while because he wanted me to get my education

I have never heard you talk about home or your family, Jane said

Just then Lois came in so our conversation was cut short From that day we started going to the Saturday night dances together It was good also to have someone to take to the square dances which had just been organized a month before the election

You all jump up and you all come down Swing your partner right around Miss Harper was calling over the speaker Around me there were continuous shuffles of feet the shouts of some totally blind student who hadn't quite made the connexion with his partner and the loud huffing sounds of fast breathing Miss Harper was calling faster and faster

Come on, Miss Harper Kenneth shouted We can do it faster

And Miss Harper asked under her breath not interrupting the rhythm of the call Can you do it boys and girls?

We can the whole floor responded and the pace of Miss Harper's calling picked up even more until the words were hardly distinguishable from each other I wasn't listening to her any more but just going through the motions which came naturally I wished the square dance would never come to a halt and that all that night the next day and the day after I would stay in motion I did not want to know Jane's age I couldn't tell why but I just did not I was not doing It was the floor beneath me that was going round and round

Texas Star ■ shou went out and no sooner had we switched the dance than Kenneth collided with Lois head on and the whole movement came to a stop It was as though the ball which had whirled the whole assembly in floor about had stopped and the floor, however was still going in circles as though

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and started rattling steampipes. They shook those steampipes so hard, down in the basement, that they woke the whole bed room up and Arlie and Jack lectured the boys with steampipes rattling, about your candidacy. They told them that Other wasn't fit to represent them if he had guts enough to disturb the whole dormitory, and I tell you, you've got it in the bag. Every boy who was awake then is with you one hundred per cent.

'I hate politics, I blurted out, the steampipes and all.

This is America, and you live in a democracy, Kenneth said. Besides, I thought you wanted to go into politics as a career. You'll need a harder stomach than you've got.

I'm through with it for ever, I said.

By nightfall, when the Braille election ballots had been counted I had received two-thirds of the votes and was the new president of the student body. Other was the first to come up to me. Flinging his hairy masculine arms about me and spitting tobacco above my shoulder he congratulated me warmly as though I were a long lost brother. A real Arkansan the boys used to call him solid as the Ozarks themselves good humoured as the best of the mountaineers.

You should have got the election, I said. That was my sincerest wish.

To win and to feel remorse for your defeated opponent he said is a privilege of democracy.

But the steampipes Other I said.

Hell's bells I did that knowing what I was doing. I wanted you to win.

We had been fast friends before but we were inseparable from that day on.

Between the Lines

WITH the passing of each day and with the learning of each new slang word or expression peculiar to America the gulf between what was home to me and what I was fast becoming grew wider and wider and sometimes in my gloomy moments it seemed for ever unbridgeable. There were always letters from home but it was as though all of them came in semi-transparent envelopes. Everyone at home hoped that I was making the best of every opportunity. All of them begged to see me. I was in their constant thoughts. Would I please look after my health. Now and then a birth was reported in the home of one of our relatives or the marriage of a distant cousin. Sometimes the news concerned my immediate family like the marriage of sister Umi to Lieutenant Gautam. India was changing. He reminded me because

she had met Gautam in Bombay all by herself without as she put it the help of the relay station of our relatives. Mother never wrote, because she could not use English and there was no one in Allahabad who could read Hindi. Whenever I thought of this I felt very depressed that I had come to Arkansas where during my whole stay I had not met another Indian or had a chance to speak Panjabi or Hindi.

Beneath the surface of the simple news from home of daily occurrences now and then there was a line, or more likely a tone which made me stop and think what sacrifices my family was going through to keep me in America. Ashok had decided not to buy shoes as yet because I was in school and the dowry of sister Umi did not begin to compare with that of sister Poma. The devaluation of Indian money right after my leaving home had really played havoc with family finances. Father wrote that he was working very hard to get some compensation for our lost home, Retirement from the Indian Government at the age

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of fifty five was compulsory, although if you were absolutely indispensable, there was an extension of one year. His extension would soon be up and then he would be jobless although brother Om, Usha, Ashok and myself were still in school.

Everyone at home wanted to know what I was learning. I could not write home that sometimes we played cards in class using French words to denote the suits pretending thus to learn a foreign language, that sometimes days would pass in a classroom without our ever reading a page. I wrote only about the classes of Mr Chiles where alone we had daily homework and where the class period was spent discussing these assignments.

They always received numerous clippings which appeared in the Arkansas papers telling about my every activity as though I were a precious specimen whose growth and development had special bearing on all Arkansans. These clippings along with the various letters written by groups who invited me to speak on India were read by my family and many of our relatives with great satisfaction. Although often I felt discouraged that the papers exaggerated my achievements and although there were times when I was quite frightened of speaking on India to groups who considered me the last authority on my country, my family took the paper cuttings and the letters at face value and as testimonials of my success. Whatever my fear, I could not communicate it over ten thousand miles.

Even with my next-door schoolmates I had a similar difficulty in communication. To them I was just another boy in his early teens who might well have spent all his childhood in those cluttered surroundings. I had wanted to become one of them and within the first few weeks I was one of them. But with it I had flung away the chance of having anyone to talk to about sisters Poni, Nimi, Umi, Usha or brothers Om and Ashok about the daily incidents on the frontiers of Pakistan and India. Even though there was no outlet for my gamut of feelings about home, my network was far from dense and my marriage of sister Umi the daughter of brother Ashok a thousand miles away was not a relieving bond.

I felt then even more humiliated, like a child who thinks he is grown up, but discovers he is really a baby

Later Ray told me that Mr Chiles had asked me a question, not once, but three times, and each time he had called my name. Where were you, old man? Ray asked incredulously, and I could not convince him that I had heard neither the question nor my name being called. I immediately went in search of Mr Chiles. I found him playing the piano in the small reception room, but I could not see him because of the cluster of teachers who were gathered around the piano singing. While waiting for him to finish, I was struck by the thought, What will I say to him how will I explain my mental absence from the classroom? But I stayed nevertheless and when he finished playing I stumbled through an apology, telling him that I could not find a way to explain my mental blackout. I had just not heard his question. The simplicity with which he accepted my apology and his own expression of regret started a lasting friendship. From that day he became my confidant and interpreter of either the intricacies of American politics that I did not understand, or of what he called the American mind.

Once I confided to him that the students I was meeting in the States seemed younger somehow than those in India.

Ours is a young and luxurious country he said where people can afford to be children longer but on a responsibility is forced upon them they mature very quickly. One has only to see the difference in an American girl before and after marriage to understand what I mean. Americans play hard but they work hard too.

It was a favourite occupation among the boys to match Mr Chiles up with one single teacher after another. It was inevitable that whichever teacher was revered second to Mr Chiles always became his bride in the imagination of the students. First it was Miss Harper then Miss Wilson and for a while even Miss Greenway. As each of these teachers got married and left the school the next attractive and more popular teacher took her place. The make believe marriage had its purpose and to do with the wish of the students to see Mr Chiles happy and

the highest happiness as Arlie used to say was in wish a blind person married because it is more necessary for him to be married in order to exist fully than it is for a sighted person.

Then too I suppose the students felt a sense of community with Mr Chiles because he was one of the few blind members of the faculty and the only one who was a graduate of the school. He was a model for all the students and was good extremely good in mobility which automatically rated him high in the mind of the blind students. Furthermore he was one of the few graduates since the founding of the school to go through college and to get his M.A.

Not satisfied with courting up brides for Mr Chiles however the speculative minds of the students had him teaching in the small private college from which he had been graduated. To be sure, a man of means like Mr Chiles did not have to teach at all. He taught because he enjoyed the activity of the mind.

I suppose he would have approved of the air castles the students built for him because he always used to talk in civics class about the American behind the headlines which he wanted to find an America not shrouded by morbid radio programmes.

A scandalous table. Students who knew him best knew also that his ideal was to be married and to settle in a small town and raise his family in its carefree atmosphere away from the big and bustling city where each good action seemed lost to him. In a big time machine he used to say, "I just want to be happy."

Miss Harper said once in her class when we were teasing her about Mr Chiles. To hear young boys and girls talk it is as though you were daydreaming for yourself and not for him. Walking the cyclopedias have a hard time of it. And then she added, "I would like some of you to wish away his nervousness, and maybe then he will be marriageable."

All sensitive and intelligent blind people are slightly nervous. Other said, "It's like a king net with away blindness."

It is so easy to daydream in the protective surrounding. Miss Harper went on, "It's like getting into a groove and not being able to snap out of it."

But the students never stopped hoping that Mr Chiles would teach in the quiet of his small college and that some day the imagined bride would appear in real flesh and blood

Everyone on the stage was talking in hushed voices because it seemed that people had started coming into the auditorium. It must not be very full I thought because I could hear the distinctive laugh of Big Jim Ernest was calling the name of a girl which I could not make out. He probably wants to sit by her, I thought

I can hear Peggy, Kenneth said but Mac sniffed. She doesn't have a tongue. 'Wonder if I'll ever see her again, Kenneth said pensively. I wish I weren't graduating.

You can't live on here for ever Mac said. Beyond the stage in the auditorium the individual voices were no longer distinguishable. It was like the sleeping hall now, multiplied manyfold.

Why is everyone so sombre? Other asked abruptly. You can afford to be cheerful Mac said because at least you know a trade that you can practise.

Yes Other, Annabelle said. You can make enough money with piano tuning.

Maybe I'll never see Peggy again Kenneth said and next year Pat will be dancing with her.

Sssh Mac shushed. Mr Woolly might hear you. To hear you all talk Other continued, you would turn this place into an asylum.

Be quiet Kenneth said irritably. All of us won't be able to get jobs as you will with your piano tuning.

I was getting uncomfortable Mr Woolly however, came up from the other side of the podium and told us that the school had never graduated seven before. Ours was the largest and the best that he remembered. Then he walked Norman over a few steps to the podium so that he might be a little wiser in the time to get his diploma. Norman had lost his notebook and his pen and was very clumsy in most things.

AMERICA AND LIBERATION

After M Woolly left Kenneth Mac Carol and Annabelle still talked despairingly about leaving school. Other was quiet now and I wondered if he was rehearsing his valedictory address. In my mind I ran rapidly through my speech. Board of Trustees Mr Woolly members of the faculty and friends. Words cannot express the pleasure and honour that we the class of 1952 have in welcoming you to this our commencement programme.

I wished they hadn't made me memorize my salutatory address. I felt nervous that Mr Davis was going to be our commencement speaker. I remembered how adamantly he had opposed my coming to the States for education. And since he was the head of the American Printing House for the Blind his high position in educational work for the visually handicapped had given him power to block my coming to America. All the correspondence was in the back of my memory and I did not want to exhume the buried grievances. Maybe I could have gone to Perkins maybe then they would not have played cards in the classrooms and maybe it during class would not have minded learning the security of school. But I did not want to think of any of that now when all was in the past. I was just happy that I had been able to squeeze my eleventh and twelfth grades into one year and was graduating a year ahead of my class.

Other said I'm not afraid of leaving the school and finding my own living outside. I feel unhappy only because I may never see many of my friends and teachers again.

The rattle of the curtain cut him short. The ceremony from beginning to end was a blur except when Mr Davis referred to our correspondence. Large beads of perspiration trickled down my back when he turned to me and publicly acknowledged that he Farrell and others had been dead wrong in advising me to stay home. I did not flush with triumph at this apology. I simply felt moved by the American candour and sincerity in his words.

When the exercise was over all the parents of the graduates came up on the small stage. I tried to slip away but Other had his arm around my shoulder. The auditorium started empty &

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and so did the stage now Ducking under Other's arm I said Excuse me as though I were a child and were excusing myself from the classroom, hoping that no one would ask why You really swung it, old man, Ray said as I came out into the hallway 'Three years ago I would have bet my life that you wouldn't be graduating with us, let alone a year ahead of us

I did not blame Ray, because I recalled going into the fifth grade arithmetic class I myself expected to be a few years behind you, I said He laughed wryly Lois came up and congratulated me for getting the Stanley award, which Ray had won my first year

Mr Davis was there now It is quite an honour to have the highest scholastic average in the whole school, he said

Among the boys Ray corrected him

I had heard of the gaiety the dances and wild parties which accompanied graduation exercises but all my class mates seemed gloomy that night There would be no parties and I felt sad All the class graduates had now joined us in the hallway

Other Annabelle said your speech almost made me cry

I thought it was the most cheerful valedictory I have heard in a long time, Mr Charles said

It was just the idea of valedictory Annabelle said I didn't even listen to him Everyone laughed but somewhat nervously, I thought

What next? Kenneth asked discouraged

AMERICA AND LIBERATION

playing the small organ. I went in and sat down to listen to the familiar melodies. When he stopped we sat down on the stage steps facing the empty auditorium and talked. He told me he wanted me to go to his small college and that if I were there he would look after me like an older brother. He said he had been hurt by the treatment I had got with my application at Columbia. In big universities he went on things like that happen. Perhaps they did happen but what would I say to my father?

Mr Chiles said I should not feel bad because some universities just balked at accepting blind people, that the school had never sent students East. In fact most of its students didn't go to college at all and what concessions the school did have were in Arkansas. He advised me to go to his college major in history as he had done and then

There was no answer to the question of what to do after that. An image of Mr Chiles his handshake his voice his particular speech mannerisms his shadow sitting next to me which I could perceive with my facial vision passed across my mind. It was hard to tell of course how nearly my image of him corresponded to the real Mr Chiles but somehow sitting there it was not hard for me to picture myself in his shoes even to the slightest unnecessary quality to which Miss Hapgood had referred. He was right when he reminded me that the orbit of influence of any one person is limited but living in that school seemed even more limited. It seemed like a self-imposed limitation. It isn't for me. I said. If Columbia thinks I am not for them then I have to look elsewhere.

We talked some more about school and my years there but it was like the last few paragraphs of a novel whose action has already been resolved. Only a few loose threads remain to be tied up such as what to do with the governess who brought up the hero.

That night I had dinner with Mr Woolly. He gave me a tie clasp with A S B engraved on it.

Son I want you to have this so that whenever you wear it people will know that you went to the Arkansas School for the

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Blind You and Mr Chiles are the best graduates we have ever had

I took the tie clasp, felt the long smooth bar, the two suspended snake chains, and the pendant in the middle Mr Woolly ran my forefinger over the raised design with the A S B seal on it

You'll never forget us, will you? he said, putting it on my neck.

How could he? Mrs Woolly said We have put our seal on him

I am deeply indebted to you, I said If it had not been for you I wouldn't have got to the States at all

Mrs Woolly and the boys walked us out to the car, where there were a number of faculty members gathered I said good bye to some of them there Others insisted they wanted to go all the way out to the airport I rode through those streets for the last time When I first arrived in Little Rock I had not been able to keep track of the direction from inside a car but now I could I could not help feeling that the most precious thing I had acquired from the Arkansas School was mobility I may not have my eyes I thought but I have the freedom of movement, a freedom of movement almost equal to that of sighted people

At the airport Mr Chiles said Who knows you might come back after the summer and go to our college after all

And Mr Woolly who had gone to the same college argued warmly for my return

I did not know then what was next for me though I knew I was outward bound I never again rode in those once familiar streets, but the warm friendships I made there all remain.

College At Last

THE air hostess asked us to fasten our belts. From the bumpy jerks, popping ear and a kind of falling motion as when I stepped into a manhole unexpectedly I knew that in a few minutes we would land at the Los Angeles airport and I would see my father at last.

I was eager to know what had happened to India in the three years I had been away. When I left free India was only two years old. By now probably she had learned to walk well and I thought could not only ask for bread but knew how and where to get it. I had lived through the birth pains of a nation and shared in the glory of the independence and the shame of the partition only to spend three years in Arkansas bottled up in a prison. By coming to America I had exchanged a position at the nerve centre of a nation for an isolated valley at the blind without even new papers to read. In many residential schools for the blind they did not have readers and there were few if any Braille talking book on India.

We were on the ground now and my father was there but it was not until we reached the privacy of his small and crowded apartment and the friend who had brought us home left that I felt at one with him. In the flow of the familiar musical Panjabi all the nuances of awkwardness and estrangement vanished.

I never was a very good violin player but I always liked the sound of it. When I did not hear a violin for some time I used to get lonely for it but it was hard to realize how lonely until I heard the long drawn-out vibrations of the *saarangi*. In the same way only when I started conversing in Panjabi did I long to go back to India and fill my mind with the melodic language.

My father placed his hands on my shoulders and quietly looked at me for what seemed a long while. "You've grown son."

COLLEGE AT LAST

in the last three years, he said, running his hands up and down my more developed arms. Let's see, you were ninety pounds when you left home.

I have put on twenty five more, I said.

You look much fuller, he said warmly, and certainly an inch taller. I wish your mother were here to see the change.

But what surprised him more than my physical growth was something else. It is the confident way you walked down that ramp and followed those two ladies ahead of you to the terminal. He added thoughtfully. It is also the way you hold your head so high.

But soon, in the press of my questions about the family, all else for a moment was pushed aside.

While I listened to my father talk about home, I paced up and down the apartment and within a few minutes I had surveyed my narrow surroundings. Father had disassembled the couch and had made two beds on the floor, one on the mattress and one on the springs. Books and papers were piled around and save for the narrow passageway where I paced there was hardly any room to move about. I thought of the large three storey house with its abundance of rooms and I felt a pang of pain for my father. This is what it had all come to, this small upstairs apartment in West Los Angeles with no servants or butler to make the beds or stack the papers. But memories of the old splendour were soon deposited deep in the well of the sultry hours as my father read to me day in day out one old newspaper after another and passages from books which told about the surge of political and economic activity at home. I felt once more as

Counting transportation five thousand dollars had been spent already twenty five thousand *rupees* enough probably for the full education of at least two or three people in India and more than my father's annual salary even though he was one of the highest paid officials in the Indian Government. The question was whether after such an expense I was any better prepared to live an independent life in India than I had been before leaving home. The answer I knew was an unqualified no.

My father reminded me that the training of Arkansas would count for nothing in India. Furthermore the cherished freedom of movement which I had acquired would also have to be surrendered because in India there were no red and green lights no regulated traffic laws comparable to America and the erratic long men bicycles and ox carts could not be expected to look after the interests of a pedestrian especially a blind one. Neither was there a comparable organization of streets or blocks. I could try of course to buck all this if I were stubborn enough but it would be a fight.

I could not get a job in the States because I was on a student's visa. To continue to live here I had the choice to be a student. But when I was asked to come to the University of California to estimate the cost of a school year they gave the flat figure of three thousand dollars. That would be the expenses for board and room for tuition and then I had to allow about one thousand dollars to pay readers to have the class assignments read to me. The B.A. degree therefore seemed not only four years but twelve thousand dollars away. And my father told me that when he got his pension it would be one hundred dollars or five hundred *rupees* a month which was enough for three or four people to live in India leaving nothing to spare.

Five hundred *rupees* in India are like five hundred dollars but when exchanged for American dollars it is like forfeiting four fifths of their value he told me.

As for obtaining a grant or assistance from the Indian Government or an Indian foundation there was not even an iota of a chance because the Indian Government had much more pressing problems than to look after the interests of any special

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group like the blind My Arkansas diploma would not be of much weight in the scales of any foundation

But for all this my father said he would not think of my going home He would borrow money

But how will you pay it back? I asked

I will open a practice in India

But that will take lots of money I said

I will get a job here in the States then he said

But I knew that was impossible because it took Asians ten years sometimes to get into the States to become citizens And then too they had to bring some money with them to prove that they would not be public charges

Don't you worry he told me I'll manage it somehow

At night, however we both pretended to sleep I always knew when he was up and he was up a good deal of the time One time we said good night to each other at ten I did not stir at all and tried to breathe heavily pretending to be asleep At two my father without any warning broke the silence with You've got to look at it another way I have managed to be here in the States with you Three years ago I could never have foreseen this day I mean what with Pakistan I never thought I could afford to leave the country

Yes I said I knew the Fulbright people had paid just his passage and the only reason he had come was so that he would be able to see me He was forbidden to earn anything in the country

I have some savings he said from the first job I had after my return

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all surrounded me. All of them seemed to speak out. If you can't eat your squab with a knife and fork you'll never get to college. You'll never get any scholarship — no grant.

As I sat next to my hosts slowly, deliberately drinking a glass of water before touching my silverware the tiny bones covered with skinlike meat seemed to be the only things between college and me. Self sufficient I was but not self sufficient enough to manage the squab. The old, the almost forgotten interview with Baldwin rose to my mind. I could not fail my father again. I picked up my fork started nibbling gradually at the wild rice and the water melon rind but carefully avoided the side of the plate with the squab. One of the guests on my right offered to help me with the squab. I yielded. For ten minutes she worked on the squab while I sat idle hot with shame. It seemed my very presence created a scene. When the plate was finally returned to me there was nothing more to the squab than a few morsels of skinny meat and I gulped them down as though I were eating a vegetable. I did not like rather than a very rare delicacy which should be held in the mouth to taste all its rich flavour.

Dinner done I was again an exhibition piece because in the living room I had to tell the guests about my Arkansas experience. For all my speaking practice my sentences were faltered and mangled and the talk was disconnected because I could no longer put the squab out of my mind.

'You are too sensitive about these things. Father said as we went home. You overdramatize them.'

Perhaps I did but I wondered how a surgeon would feel who had performed many operations successfully but behind one right in full view of the operating theatre. If his gallery of watchers had no knowledge of his past success would he not be judged by this operation alone?

A few days later he sent a grant for two years fifteen hundred dollars a year as confirmation and — last I could tell — in my college career. Although I was so anxious to go to college I was so special arranged for a special college at a special time and place and I was so special that I was so special.

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to tell him that or how to explain it. I will as soon as I get one, sir. I guess within my soul I still hoped that people watching me cross the street would realize I could do it without a cane and would stop talking to me about it.

About a week later he stopped me again. The dean called me, he said, and he's afraid you will get killed. I hate to keep on bringing up this subject, but your cane.

In those two weeks since I had been at Pomona I had crossed College Way at least four times a day but still the question of a cane seemed to persist.

I will not carry it, sir, I said.

If you are shy about it, he went on kindly, just use it while you are crossing streets and then hide it under bushes before coming to class.

I am not ashamed of being blind, I said, moved deeply by his sensitivity. That's written over me in larger letters than any cane could ever write. It's just that I don't need the cane.

Whether it was my facial expression or his own sensitivity, he never mentioned the subject again but the dean once accosted me in the middle of the quadrangle.

Why won't you carry that cane? he asked. You'll get killed.

Trying to dismiss the subject with humour, I said, Death only comes once and I am not afraid of dying.

It might come once but once is enough to kill me. How about you? he asked wryly.

In cafeteria lines it was like meeting so many hundreds of

than writing with pencil. Coming from the Arkansas School, where I had to write scarcely more than two pages of theme every two or three months, organizing and writing papers sometimes twice a month for a class was difficult. For all the accumulated handicaps, I could not afford to go to a professor and explain that I had no readers, or excuse my bad work because of my poor background. I could not afford to create the impression that any part of my problem was related to my blindness. Above all, I wanted to be treated as normal.

In my room I could not go to sleep. I used to turn my phonograph on at full blast and listen to the blurred music, wondering if I would get my grant for the next year or if I would have to go home. Sometimes in the middle of the night I would get out of bed, take the first bicycle standing without a lock and ride up and down the empty familiar streets stealthily because I wanted privacy. I would pedal hard and would come home tired, and then I could not always fall asleep.

As the months progressed, however, I started losing less and less sleep over my work, because it started improving and I got assurance that I would have enough money to see me through college. I banished worry for inner quietude and relaxation and I perfected my technique of getting readers. Professors would point out to me their best students and I would approach them either at the dinner table or at the student union about reading our assignments together. I found that students working this way through college were more reliable. I also used as fill-in some elderly readers that the dean who had by now become a good and resourceful friend referred me to. Even before the first semester was over I had about a ten hour a day reading schedule. After my rigorous reading schedule I still would not be tired and would come home to read whatever literature I could find on talking books. Gradually I started cutting my sleep from the nine hours I had had in Arkansas to about six or occasionally even five.

My a quainter and better student would be tired and a solid train of ideas would be in my mind.

COLLEGE AT LAST

because of his unique personality, after the memorable character in *Huckleberry Finn*. The Dauphin's opinion itself would not have carried much weight if it did not reflect the gamut of notorious misconceptions about my having some sight or being blessed with some supernatural power or perception which persists among the people who should know better.

IN SEARCH OF SIGHT

at a street corner or sitting at a counter, or the kind driver whose
you can hear coming faster and faster while you wonder
whether he will pass you by like the one before him or stop. You
remember vividly the moment when a car slows down, and a
he says, Hey, feller — want a ride? or Where are you
going? or Can I give you a lift? And when you come to the
end of the journey often the driver, who is now a friend, insists
on getting out and helping you flag down the next relay.
Sometimes my hitch hiking has turned into a circus. I re-
member, for instance, a kind elderly lady who was genuinely
concerned with my parents not taking better care of me and
letting me out on the streets like a vagabond. In a wayside
place in Texas under the pretence of taking me to a gas station
to catch the next ride, she turned me over to a police deputy
with a blustering harangue that I was probably a runaway state
ward and if the Democrats had been in power I would have
received better care. I was irritated until after she drove off, the
deputy told me that she had left twenty dollars with him for a
train ticket to take me back to Washington. We had a lively
discussion about what to do with the money and finally decided
to send it to the Democratic campaign fund. The deputy then
took me to a petrol station where I caught my next ride.
Somewhere I also have tucked away the card of a cutlery
salesman who thought my blindness would be a terrific asset
in salesmanship. So if you ever get in a jam he said in that
thick Southern accent come to me. I kept the card as a
souvenir. After all he did take me two hundred miles. All these
experiences sometimes embarrassing sometimes touching
make the lives of those of us who are blind.

IN SEARCH OF SIGHT

I was disappointed, but what else was there to do?

You see, there was a man, crippled — no let's say lazy — and he was sitting with another man who was going to a john and the lazy man told the other man to go for him too. And being kind hearted, as he was, he consented. When he came out the lazy man asked this man if he had done what he had told him. Well, the man who had gone to the toilet said, you see after I went, you didn't need to go any more. He laughed at us on a joke I felt crushed.

You see how it is in this game? Each man for himself, he said.

A wrong card, I thought to myself.

You remind me of Sam, he said with an air of finality.

But Sam who had listened too didn't say anything. I could not let it go at that. I had hid my innermost feelings many times before. Iranians and Indians. I said are friends from old historic times.

Thank you Sam said and only then was I glad that I had coupled myself with him.

Simon you're cruel Sam said reproachfully.

I'll try Simon said but one man's meat is another man's poison. Besides the trouble with Ved is that he looks too much like a walking encyclopedia.

I couldn't contain myself any more. Like hell I do I said.

Being new in a university where no one knew me at all I found it hard to get readers. I asked the professor if he would make an announcement in my class which was four or five times the size of any at Pomona that there was a blind student who would like his assignments read and who would be willing to pay twenty-five cents an hour. But he told me in such an incoherent way that I was that although at each class I waited for

IN SEARCH OF SIGHT

people who can read aloud more than two hours a day. And then you still have to put in your hours at the grocery store on Sundays!

She would not hear of it, and once or twice, when she read to me late at night I walked her to her dormitory. And this was the beginning of our warm relationship.

She had thick hair, a slight and slender body, a round mouth, and a mellow alto voice which always sounded fresh and alive and which reflected the modulation of her emotions amazingly accurately. Her laugh was subdued but full, and she walked as though she had no weight at all. Whether we were at concerts, the theatre, movies or restaurants she always knew how to conduct me without an iota of embarrassment. There was, of course, nothing hard about directing a blind man because it was I who escorted her, not vice versa. All she had to do was place her hand firmly in mine, and when walking through crowded aisles, not nervous. She allowed me to order for her, open doors, help her off buses and let me walk her home as anyone else would.

When we were on a day's outing together and went into a restaurant for lunch or dinner she would say sweetly, "Watch up me" and would explain to me from the table the twists and turns so well that I could walk directly towards the room without using a cane.

IN SEARCH OF SIGHT

taking out. He was terribly agitated, a state unsuited for a first meeting although quite in order for a bridegroom. He stopped looking around for girls in the dining room and at next to me as though to show his gratitude. I started wondering if I should have meddled in it at all since Sam wouldn't give me any peace. Simon repeatedly insisted that he wanted to see Sam's date. Just to size her up, he said, because Sam wasn't a connoisseur as he was. He decided he would take his girl to the play also, just to appraise the object of Sam's agitation.

When the night finally arrived everything went off all right. Sam and I picked up the girls and it seemed to me that Sam liked his date, because they talked easily. After the play, however, when Simon came to size her up, he whispered something possibly his judgement to Sam. After that everything was miserable. There were awkward pauses and dead silences in the car. Syl and I could do nothing to make the wheels turn smoothly. I dreaded a moment alone with Sam, so when the evening was over, I stayed a while longer with Syl.

The next morning at breakfast, however, poor Sam was the butt of it all. She looks exactly like a sheep, Simon said, and Simon's girl friend was laughing at his description of Syl's room mate.

He doesn't look too much better than a goat himself, you know, she whispered to me. You really matched them well.

One man's meat is another man's poison. Ved, Simon said, and then he said, You should know better than to ask a blind

IN SEARCH OF SIGHT

and pressed it, but it ached. Syl was flanked by the girls, and I sat on the aisle seat. I did not follow the movie at all. When it was over I tried to get beside Syl and have a word with her, but her friends were talking to her about the movie. Again with the girls leading, we started walking back towards the dormitory. John was on the street side this time and held me fast.

The reason no one has asked about my forehead, I thought, is because one of the girls put her finger to her lips. I felt as isolated from the group as though they were talking, not with words but with gestures, and to divine their meaning one had to see the movements of their hands. No matter how well trained one was in mobility, how well adjusted to a seeing society, there were always some lamp posts left out of one's calculations.

I wished they would change the topic of conversation from the movie to something else so that I might stop appearing like a chided, sulking child. But nevertheless I yielded to a trance of reverie, the way a man in a trench overpowered by odds surrenders himself to private reflections.

When I pulled myself together and entered into the conversation, it seemed John had persuaded the girls to go on an all right hike with him. They were to sign in at Syl's dormitory and then slip out the window. It was all so unlike Syl.

While you girls are doing that, John said, I'll walk Ved to the International House.

He'll come with us, Syl said, but not a single one of her

AMERICA AND LIBERATION

I thought about Sam and his bald head. He felt lonely because he was going on thirty and away from home there was no one to love him or for him to love. Simon was away from home too and like Sam he never wanted to return. But I was different from them both because I wanted to go home. I wondered how many Sams there were — blundering Sams who had bald heads or looked like goats or could not walk straight because they tried to forget their loneliness by drinking.

As I approached Telegraph Avenue I heard the long drawn out muffled notes of a violin. They were distant and hard to place but they persisted like the mellifluous melodies played on a flute late at night which I had heard so often at Murree Hills. Those musical flights of simple mountaineers seemed innocent compared to the subtle and rich notes of the violin.

I was absent of the cafe a few people were gathered around its door. It was clear that the violinist was inside.

What is it? I asked stirred by the music.

A beautiful girl is playing a violin someone answered after a pause.

Another commented. She practises every night after the cafe closes.

No one can go in? I asked.

The door is shut I heard.

I stood apart from the group clustered around the door. By and by they left but the violin was still being played. Maybe they'll let me in I thought since I am alone now and I knocked at the pane first gently and then hard and frantically but it did no more than just disturb the music for my ears. At that moment, Syl seemed as unattainable as the violinist. I could come and listen to her play tomorrow and the day after but the yesterday of Syl and mine was gone. There was no reasonable explanation for it but I knew her friends had brought with them an imperceptible change a change as looming and solid as the lamp-post.

I stood at the door for at least an hour longer until the violin was put away. And then with my head hung low and the hands of my watch pointing to the early hours of the morning I

IN SEARCH OF SIGHT

started walking towards International House unconscious of all my surroundings

Hey, there I heard from behind me, but I kept on moving at the same pace

You there, stop! the man shouted again I did not turn around, but simply waited for the intruder to come abreast.

You are drunk, the voice said militarily

What is it to you? I said starting to move away

The intruder gripped my arm hard and I felt too low spirited to either struggle or be angry In a moment the policeman was apologizing profusely I thought sir you were drunk I didn't know We are not supposed to he continued but I would like to give you a ride.

I was too weak to decline He drove me to International House in his secure police car

K AND PROMETHEUS

A few months later, as I was going out through the door next to the mural I nudged K's shoulder and stopping to apologize, I fell into conversation with him. He had been viewing the mural intently, and standing there, he explained to me pensively the meaning to him of the portrayed figure and the torch. Although it was hard for me to visualize the image at all I was impressed by K's thoughtfulness in taking the time to explain something which, all during the months I had been there, no one else had. At last Prometheus who brought the torch of knowledge and made men out of clay became alive for me. This was also my introduction to K who as the time went on became my fast friend.

Although I never got a single connected story about K's background, in snatches sometimes from him sometimes filtered through his Japanese friend Kaz I did come to have a good notion of his past. He was a Nisei and many times he felt conflicting loyalties to the Japanese and American cultures. Through the rigorous training by his mother in Buddhism and in the rich tradition of his culture he had come to know Japan well though at second hand. All his life he had lived in a community which was segregated from the Americans and in which as he used to say "my people try to make a little model of Japan." He never liked to talk about the years he had been forced to spend in a relocation camp after Pearl Harbour except to explain the long gap in his education. Sure we had classes for a while but we were out in the open but we never did very much. We couldn't. Child that I was I used to think the Americans would

I AND PROMETHEUS

put into my pocket so that I won't feel embarrassed. In Japan I would never accept money like that from a sister. Whether because of these conflicting allegiances or because of the suffering he had seen around him in the camp of which he never spoke, he was a very lonely man. Kaz and I were his only friends and even to us he never revealed his inmost thoughts. When occasionally he asked a girl out and she did go with him one way or another we would find out. I asked him once why he did not ask girls out more often. In reply, I said, the law of averages would be in your favor.

I don't know why, he soberly replied and then added. For no reason I would just as soon sit by my window and look at girls below and listen to their laughter from the swimming pool. They seem so distant from me.

I liked America and realized that had he lived in Japan he would probably never have gone as far as college with the means his family had. In this country he could work and go to school at the same time. Here people instead of looking down on him, value it, he said and although now and then he felt that he could not always get the jobs he wanted or even a right to live in because he was a Jap - that is he looked Chinese - he didn't bear any grudge against America for that matter. If the Japanese were in America's shoes he used to think they would be much more cruel to non-Japanese.

Yes I said you can cross all frontiers

He wanted to work for better Japanese American relations only if I had the capacity of mind he used to say modestly He was never given to overconfidence in himself probably because he was so uncertain as to who he really was My background he reminded me as Japanese but my education American American because he never took courses in Japanese culture or Buddhism He studied only Western civilization

Of all his history teachers he liked Dr Meyer best Meyer's speciality as modern German and central European history and this made him unusually sensitive to the question of minorities

He knows K said once to me when I arise and when not to arise the question - I mean about the Japanese American problem - with him and also how to do it

During his senior year K fretted a lot about graduate school There were only a few seniors in his department that year Two of them got fellowships to go abroad or East but K did not The only feasible one he got was from the Claremont Graduate School which offered to pay his tuition but board and room were still a problem He applied to the dean for a resident

ship After the interview with the dean he said I just couldn't communicate with him Words came out but feelings and responses did not It didn't seem to belong to his office

All interview go badly I told K Don't worry you'll get it

But it took Meyer's firm support to get him the job He was all set for another year

He went home and told him there One more year and I'll be on my feet Then I'll be teaching school and I'll take care of you Ma

But he hesitated in inquiring about a teaching job some of the professors at graduate school discouraged him They said it would be hard to place a Japanese American in a high school even with his good record and his teaching credentials K started worrying again

My mother he said just can't work more than another year

F AND PROMETHEUS

Meyer gave him another boost. "K, you have a good mind. He
J Teach in college. There you won't meet with any preju-
e, and I'll help you get fellowships to see you through.
H came home and told me that Meyer was a wonderful guy.
h has that much faith in me. He told me, 'I won't disap-
n him.'

graduated *cum laude* in 1954. He felt sad that Meyer was
ng to be away the following year on a leave of absence, and
troubled him that he was already twenty-four years old and
a Ph.D. was such a big gamble. Although the fellowships
ht make him independent, the time required for the degree
ld prevent him from helping his mother. But all these fears
: put aside temporarily amidst the enthusiasm of his family
it his graduation. His mother was glad that her son had
a degree from an American college, and his sisters proud
use they, too, had worked and helped put K through school.
American mother wrote to him that all her confidence in K
was completely justified.

The next year, however, when he returned to school, the
conflict between getting a Ph.D. or a teaching certificate contin-
ued. He had an obligation to Meyer and to him. If he also
had an obligation to his mother. He told me that year before
the Thanksgiving vacation, "I have done some thing very wrong.
I haven't told my mother that I'm going on for the Ph.D. She's
expecting me to be through next year. I don't know how to go
about telling her."

handsomely But at the end K. paid the bill I knew you wouldn't feast a well if I told you I would pay he said I struggled and I argued but it was he who took the cheque

K. had already begun to write his M.A. thesis because he wanted something in place of the certificate to show his mother He wished he could work on the minority problem but since Meyer was away he chose the topic The Idea of Progress In the essay he wanted to show the change in the conception of progress between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries He was overwhelmed by the material he had to read The library he told me is like a forest I don't know where to begin I could read for the rest of my life and still not get it all in

As soon as he started writing he started fretting Many a time I found him sitting at his typewriter in a small cubicle in the old dormitory where he was forced to live because of his assistantship hammering away at sheet after sheet He would write a page wouldn't like it and would throw it away Once he wrote at least twenty times and still he wasn't happy with it

Leaving K. I told him Go away for a couple of days to a beach on the mountains Just go away from this room and from this typewriter

But he kept on with it doggedly He started saying I am a morose fit for anything

At last he had the first draft of his thesis completed One professor told him that his style didn't run smoothly enough probably because it had been worked over too much Another vaguely intimated that perhaps K. should think about high school teaching quite seriously I heard the whole essay through and tried to help him with the structure here and there The deadline was May 2.

K. I said why don't you get an extension?

He blew up You don't think much of my intellect either do you?

That was the last thing on my mind I said I just wanted you to have a little bit more time to think about it

K AND PROMETHEUS

He ran out of my room But he called me a few minutes later to say he was sorry

When the spring vacation came, I asked K bluntly about what I had hinted at so many times I have come to know your mother and sisters so well through you Why haven't you introduced me to them as yet?

Because — and he stuttered — I am ashamed of the way we have to live I couldn't let you see our house Besides we are so poor My mother

I protested I pleaded Do you think that matters? I asked I told him about my own parents and how we had had to live after the partition, but there was nothing I could do to dissuade him and I could not very well invite myself to his house

I hoped he would come back from the vacation refreshed but he returned even more troubled The day I went home I saw my mother picking onions in the field Just think picking onions eight hours a day And here I am the only man in the family, doing nothing

They probably love to sacrifice for you K I said but he could not take it that way

I am caught he said in the choice between further education and my duty to my mother

And I knew already which of the two worlds had won

K AND PROMETHEUS

Gleason will understand, I said assuredly. He a very understanding man. There was a pause. K. I said give me your word that you will call Gleason right after you hang up and get the deadline extended. He hesitated. Promise me. I insisted.

If you say so I will, he said. I want to see you very badly. May I come over now?

Without thinking I said. My father is here. I'd like very much to have you meet him. Let's arrange to have dinner together. I waited for a response. K. are you there?

Yes, he said briskly, and all of a sudden I felt guilty for putting him off. I guess that's all, he said then definitively.

I will come by tomorrow, I said, and then we can make arrangements for our dinner together. I reminded him about his promise to get the deadline extended and we hung up.

Twice the next day I went over to his room. But he was not there. His bed was littered with papers. The wastepaper basket was full of them also. I took a paper out of the wastepaper basket and started to type him a note to call me as soon as he got back. But there was a page in the machine already so I left the note.

That night I left my father at the train and went to the college to pick up some clothes and to see K. This was the first time since I had known him except for the summer and Christmas vacations that we had not seen each other for such a long time.

F AND PROMETHEUS

As had been a light to me. And even the light of this lamp earned now, had been shaded, obscured, only to be shrouded forever. To live, one had to form meaningful human relationships, but how did one lift the shade and look into the glacial world people did live, certainly, knowing friends as though they were not so many faces in ticketed theatre seats but I wanted something more, something as elusive as light to blind eyes, but as warm and certain as the full glow of the sun.

And my father called if you ever feel completely licked — and I listened — promise me one thing.

He paused for answer but I could not even bring out: What?

Promise that you will write to me first to pour out your heart and then wait for my answer before you finally act.

For me this was a big thing to promise but not to my father. I promised. I said: Then from the heavy breathing I could tell my father was asleep but I still wondered how long he would be there to receive my letter and what after him.

The next morning As's mother and sisters came to see him and although I wanted to see them very much I did not because I respected his decision.

After a week my father left for Europe and I was back in circulation. People came up to me and warmly expressed their sorrow, as though I were As's blood relation. One said he wanted to write a poem in As's memory. Another remarked: I could have been any one of us. And another told me how the night before he showed himself when everyone had fallen asleep, too, and he had stood before the damned mural of Prometheus and had a celestial encounter.

was only the coating of the real problem of wanting time time for reflection, for just ruminating - above all for developing my sensibilities as a human being. By no means did I wish to stop reading or give up education. My predilections towards literary literature and philosophy were as strong as ever. I simply wanted to study these subjects in my own time and in my own way without any deadlines.

By the end of May, however the finals began and I suffered through them with that last bit of energy which a child has when he is lost in the woods and is trying hard to find his way home. After I turned in my last exam to my contemporary literature professor, he wished me a good summer. You should have a lot of time to think this summer, he said. Remember there is a difference between being sensitive and weak and being sensitive and strong.

I left Pomona without giving the registrar a stamped envelope for my transcript. I started on a leisurely trip to the East Coast to spend my summer at Harvard to study literature and writing.

There I passed the summer reading and taking long writing walks. The summer gave me time to try my hand at some short stories and to start listening all around me for human situations. It appeared that people did a very good job of hiding their anxieties and often my imagination read more into situations than really existed. Nevertheless the few short stories were good unless hanging my imagination and the literature for reflection on some of my localities. When I left in the reaction core and headed towards California I was really with a child and hammer to try to open the door of the world.

She was never on time for dates so when ever we went to concerts or plays I used to arrive early at the house where she lived with three other girls. While he dressed up stairs humming a folk tune as though she were in a time less world I would wait for her with a heavy heart because I thought she was used to boys telling her how well she looked. But when she ran down the steps and greeted me as though she had been thinking about me the whole day in her full presence all my trepidations fled.

You know she said once coming down the stairs I think you may not know how I look but you know how I feel. That's much more important. I felt glad I bet you even know how I look on a particular day don't you? she said suspensively.

She is human after all I thought to myself. It would have taken so little effort for me to say yes except where facts about blindness were concerned I was scrupulously honest.

No I said.

Then we'll pretend you do know she said cheerfully and it was like receiving a shot of adrenaline. She seemed to me at that moment life itself life which I had wanted for a long long while but which until now I had never met.

We'll pretend then if you like I said and hand in hand with a light step we walked out.

One evening after we had known each other a month she said to me I think we are going to get married. I said what? she said yes she went on. We do things together but I don't know

I am one of the people she pursued who has to have faith to believe

It was true for it was hard to conceive of Mary without religion

I can't understand how anyone can be without it she persisted

I left her and walked to the window Mary it does no good talking about it I said I am if you like still searching I have no answer and I am not sure I am in a position to make any commitment as yet

But I would he went on if you ever will You talk as though it is an act to believe in God You just think too much

I flung the window wide open and let in a draught It must be so or there in the morning I thought.

Come here and sit beside me she said and I did I could not be close to anyone, he observed who I thought was rejected by God the Christian God

Do you really think Mary I asked that there is no salvation outside Christianity?

Yes he said as far as I know

It is the first time he had qualified her yes You've changed I said if you can admit that much

I am willing to hang for you she said but only so far

I wouldn't want you to change You're good very good I said but you have to understand me too

How can I understand? Do I ever argue about who my father is? Then how can I about God?

What struck me was the simplicity of her faith yet I was sure her mildness and quietude even peace the very qualities which had attracted me to her were engendered by it I could have argued then as I had before with her and pointed out the simplicity of her belief but it seemed to me useless

Mary I said let's decide never to talk about religion

We have to she said for my peace of mind Otherwise we can't go on like this.

It was like confessing to a glass of wine filled to the brim In order to drink it I had to lift it and clumsy as I was, I knew in

MARY

bringing it to my lips I would spill some of the precious contents, and I could not afford to lose a single drop

Mary we are happy together I said except when we talk about religion I took her hand in mine It was perspiring Don't deny me Mary something I've really had for the first time I pleaded You don't know how much all this means to me

She came closer

As I walked home that night the air smelled of rain and before I reached my room it had begun to drizzle mildly I was happy that the night had not ended badly as it usually did when we talked about religion But I also knew that for all our closeness we could not reach each other as long as we talked on different levels

A change gradual and subtle almost imperceptible had come over our relationship since the night we had talked about religion It was hard to say when where or how it had come about Maybe it was the day we had an argument about D. B. Sedgwick's in the college paper Although I argued with her then D. B. was a cynic to his teeth I liked what he wrote and always found occasion to be amused by the little Mary's of our country I disliked him intensely because he was not proud and a non-ambitious thing

a bad taste in my mouth because in a sense she seemed to represent to me all that was good and kind and affectionate in this world and yet the very naïveté for which I criticized her was the underpinning of her character

Based on what the reason of sentiment it was apparent to both of us that the relationship was losing its savour. She started giggling with Bud who sang in the glee club and was a member of a powerful social fraternity. The boys teased him about calling up girls who had not even met and telling them that he was the handsome boy in the school therefore they should go out with him. Bud was often at Mary's place and I could not get just walk. All Southern gentlemen she said teasingly call before they come. And if he was there when I called she would say simply I have company now. Why don't you call back late? Some time when I was there and Bud would telephone she would call him and then he would double over with laughter and embarrassment.

Once she told me about corresponding with two boys who were in the Navy. Supposing you had a choice between those two whom would you choose? she asked.

Describe them to me. I said and he did colourfully. With a smile I asked. Choose for what?

For marriage.

I considered with a serious air and then alighting upon one man shall I call the facts that make him attractive.

Oh she said you are playing games with me.

No I said I am in earnest.

You bore me. You talk as though I were buying a house not picking a man to marry.

That's the way things are done in India. I said gravely.

She blew up. What's the matter with you? Aren't you ever jealous? Don't you care about me at all? To my utter amazement she wept while I sat helplessly idly putting my handkerchief up to her face.

She muttered. You don't care you don't care.

Oh but I do. I said consolingly but I know my place. I reflected that if it was a good time she was told she could have a

MARY

much better time with Bud than she ever could with me. He could take her to parties, banquets, and dances of his fraternity and whenever I was with Mary I preferred her all to myself.

What do you really think of me? she asked, probing me.

I pondered the searching question. You are for me, I said, the soul of America to the nth degree. You are friendly, you are kind, you are generous, and above all, you accept me as I am.

I don't want speeches, she said, and drying her eyes with my handkerchief, she moved closer to me.

Mary put both her hands on my arm. I could literally feel her gaze.

You are joking, you aren't serious, she exclaimed.

I am in earnest, I said, with a broad smile playing on my face.

Why didn't you tell me? We would have had a party, and a birthday cake and if you wanted twenty-two candles.

Oh, come, I said, that's much too many for a cake.

I would have made one myself, large as a tray. Let's call up Jean and Jack and Nicholas and David and have a real party.

I don't want a party, I just want to be with you, I said.

She ran into the kitchen and I followed her. Oh, it's so empty, she said. I don't have anything here at all.

Let's have cinnamon toast and coffee like we always do, I said.

She found a napkin with Happy Birthday written on it and a few candles from the Christmas cake. She made the cinnamon toast and introduced me to her mother. She called on the

I like you better than anyone, for all our differences?

I do I said

Then in an almost excited tone, Let's love each other in a special way We'll pretend we are completely alike There is no difference between us We agree on everything everything

A game? I asked smiling hard

No at all but a way of really finding ourselves Let's pretend everything is really all right

Let's I said and I took both her hands in mine and tried to get used to her complete reality to her beautiful Southern drawl and her gentle and soft voice

Let's never talk about Dick she begged

Let's not I said under the complete spell of life itself I got up and put my arms around her

When I walked home that night late Mary seemed to me Pawalpindi home and yet much more In my mind she was that violin player in the small café on Telegraph Avenue But this time she had opened the door and had not only freed me warily but served me coffee and held my fumbling hand in her long fingers and warm palm

AMERICA AND LIBERATION

erson could have a more solid prop because it would not be founded on the quicksand of pretence. Yet however solid the prop of tomorrow and even though it might support a relation ship more mature it would be deficient in the sensation of a first full experience a new discovery.

Epilogue

was graduated in June with the class of 1956 and soon thereafter took to the broad highway to the East Coast on the first leg of my journey to England. I felt sad because before the summer vacation was up the huge American continent would be behind me. I had come to love America almost as deeply as home and owed more to her than I did to India because she had given me education, freedom of movement, a complete sense of self-worth, and a glimpse into what a full life could be in the persons of Syl and Mary. All these things my own country had not been able to do because I was blind.

Among the very best people I had met in the country were

EPILOGUE

and American education and both of them because I was blind. Once again to a new American source a source similar to those that he had seen me through four years of college which circumventing technical ground decided to support me at Balliol College.

As I said good by to my friends in California Texas Tennessee and Maryland they all pleaded for my return to America. These friends with genuine sentiment suggested that I settle in America instead of returning home by way of England. They argued that here I could find a fuller and richer life and if settled in a university community I could forget altogether the prejudice about blindness and many of the day-to-day irksome reminders which no handicapped man is allowed to escape.

Living in America a very alluring prospect for me in so many practical ways the freedom of movement in contrast to India's streets which have a pool of fat all regulated by traffic laws and light the blindness of reader which will be a great problem for me in India (it is almost impossible to understand Hegel Aristotle and Eliot if you read does not comprehend as well). And I shall find intellectual stimulation find in the great traditions of English and American philosophy and letters with them.

But how could I do this my life to the extent when I have such a dream of being with their youthful years in an asylum and men I am committed to the drudgery of begging to be able to use the only good use they can make of their blindness? How could I justify giving up a large and more rewarding group which I have grown to?

With the Pacific line receding and the Atlantic Coast looming ahead I thought about England and my decision to spend two or three years at Oxford reading history before making my way to the Indian Ocean. I had plenty of misgivings during the time I was making this decision. However much I argued that the two years at Oxford would further fortify my education allow me leisure to read and reflect at my own pace and give me more time to mature I could not help asking myself whether all this was not rationalization whether I was

EPILOGUE

dreading returning to India because I had become too Americanized whether this postponement of two years might not ultimately result in my returning to America to live

Yet against all of these practical arguments I can place my strong love for and devotion to India. My return there constitutes both a challenge and a responsibility. It seems to me that I have acquired a human debt to my professors to the people who have educated me in American ways and this debt can at least be partially repaid if I return home to help solidify the bond of friendship between these nations.

Aside from this debt there is the memory of Sohan, daring and brave, who offered his life for his burning conviction. I owe it to his memory and to the memory of others like him sacrificed to an unwise division of a nation and the betrayal of an ideal of peace and non-violence to go home soon and to try to do much to undo his story but to help guide it in however small a way on a more calm and peaceful course. Perhaps, going to England is rationalization but looked at in another way it seems a logical route for heading home. I really want to come to know these Englishmen to whom Sohan offered himself and I think

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reminded me locked in a struggle for industrial revolution has use only for professional people, preferably with technical skills

The ambassador from India who had been visiting in Los Angeles some months before my departure pointed out to me that I would not be allowed to take either the civil or diplomatic service examination because the Indian Government felt that blind persons could not hold jobs with the same degree of competency as the sighted

Do you think there is any chance for a change in its attitude? I asked him

I think not he said

As for entering college teaching or a journalistic career similar handicaps exist in India because no blind person has been able to pull himself up from the mesh of notoriously bad educational facilities for the blind and hold a top-flight job Those blind individuals who have succeeded have either taken up a law practice or gone into education for the blind But then another good natured Indian told me Lawyers are starving in India and unless you are absolutely sure you want to be nothing else in your life except a lawyer I would not advise your going into it

As for educational work for the blind at home I cannot help feeling that working through bureaucracy is not the only way to help the wretched lot of the two million so handicapped What is needed is a living example that if given the proper opportunities the blind can succeed Such an example from the outside can do much more in creating opportunities than bucking the red tape or being another selfless Mr Chiles in the Dadar School

All these handicaps are negligible when placed against the tremendous obstacle of correcting the attitude which looks upon blindness as a punishment inflicted by the gods for a sin committed in this previous incarnation In a country where many people hold that blindness is a curse all the accomplishments all the signs of a successful adjustment to a seeing society would count for little Having enjoyed a more understanding less superstitious, and certainly more educated attitude here in

EPILOGUE

America, I ask myself, can I conceivably return to such a deadening climate? Can I rely ultimately on my love and devotion for India to sustain me there in such an atmosphere until a signal change can be brought about which, heaven knows, might not come in my lifetime at all?

As I prepare to leave for England I am surrounded by carrens full of books and records two vices to which I have given free play in the last seven years. Each familiar cover of a book encloses not only a fund of knowledge but a fond memory of the readers whose tireless efforts made these books come alive for me. The great history of Thucydides conjures up Ann Coethe and Joyce Albert. Plato and T. S. Eliot Eugene. The record have their similar associations. The album of *Don Giovanni* bring the image of Dick beside me in the auditorium and Rich & B minor Miss JoAnn.

As I stack these books and records in boxes with a musty smell they seem like so many fond treasures given to me by America. I should feel sadder and lonelier without them. And without a hope that I shall hear and feel America again for now America is as much my home as any place in this fool loose world. But my taking leave is made easier because as I look towards the island across the Atlantic even now there is a plan approaching carrying out a better world coming to be. For the first time of its kind we shall meet and I shall hear her voice walk with her in the ablest of her.

Publisher's Note

After completing this book in 1956 at the age of twenty-two Mr. Mishra went up to Oxford where he spent three years and took a degree in Modern history and then following a summer in India he went on to Harvard where he continued his studies for a year and a half longer since 1961 he has been a staff writer on *The New Yorker*. In addition to *Face to Face* he has written *Walking the Indian Streets* (1960) a travel book about India and Nepal *Fly and the Fly Bottle* (1963) a report on contemporary philosophers and historians in England *The New Theologians* (1966), a report on Christian thinkers in England the United States, Switzerland and Germany and *Delinquent Chicks* (1967) a comic novel about a middle-aged Indian set in India and England. A publisher's note that was included in the English edition of his second book *Walking the Indian Streets* read

Glossary

- ACHKAN A long coat for men with a high buttoned collar
- AGNI Fire
- ALL-CHIKOLE Potato and chick pea, cooked in a pungent sauce
- BAHAI Sister
- BAIA Trader or shopkeeper see Caste
- BARAT Bridegroom's party
- BIHARI Mother or grandmother
- BHAIRO A male pattern in music
- BIBI A lady, wife
- BIFI Cigarette
- BOW CATTA A cry following victory in a late battle
- BRAHMAN See Caste

GLOSSARY

* Many adopted words of Persian and Arab origin are common to the northern India and is understood by a population of about 200 million of the United States. Hindi has been selected by the Indian Government to become the national language.

LATHER Has a stick bound with iron
LUSSE B. Milk.

MALI Gardner

MARATHI See Languages.

MELA A fair held in connexion with a religious festival.

MILIT Ceremony of introduction a marriage between two tribes and groups.

MISTREES Shal d. Dancers

MULLAH A religious leader

NAMASTE Lit. I bow down to thee. A greeting of respect.

ON SHA VS SHA VS I- ca. - of price, lit. a measure

DELINQUENT CHACHA

V d Mehta

I th am f St G rge St Andrew St Da id and St
Pat k the b w t h g p tro sants of o r rstwhile rul s,
I gr t yo And who w uld n t eturn the greeti g f De
l nquent Chach Esq Ind ge tl man of m y words
and f w possess ns eckless d cam fer ent bel ever in the
O F d ed cation to wh h h s fath m ble intellect w s
ever e pos d dom table r l of th Briti h Raj co
n isseur f ma ers and eve t al comm ssion e of the
All I di T j Mah l C rry Chutn y d Soup Resta ant
in Lond

A A gl m a whom wayw d fat ha br ught to
th land of h l ng pas and who o e there is first
bedecked with im gi ry ho ours d th n p opelled head
l g into th jaw urts D l nque t Cha ha s om c
char ct o ly alut a h l tes Her Grac s
Majesty The Quee with tw fi gers f the left h nd n
th f h d a d a l w bow from the w ist

Not for l th USA o C d

